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DEDICATED

TO

ALL WHO LOVE HAPPY HOMES,

BY THE AUTHOR.

THAT HUSBAND OF MINE.

Chapter One.

WO long legs, a cut-away coat, a wide-awake hat — that's Charlie! A run at the door, a kiss, a hug, — and he has such long arms! — and then, —

"O Charlie! what *do* you think?"

"Why, I think I'm hungry, little woman," he said, sniffing the savory viands just hot enough to enjoy.

"Yes, but what would you like, of all things in the world, best, just now?"

"A cup-custard, I think, or a Charlotte Russe," he answered, following me into the little red-carpeted sitting-room.

"You horrid old gourmand! always thinking of eating!" I cried, the tears in my eyes.

"But what can a man do else about dinner-time?" he asked, putting his hat down without looking, and then jumping a foot high at the shriek I presently set up.

"O Charlie, you've put your hat right into the custard! I brought it out here to cool," was my agonized rejoinder. And then I took up the horrid thing by its flapping brim, and held it there dripping large yellow flakes.

"By Jove! it's ruined!" he exclaimed in a tragic voice.

"The custard — spoilt irretrievably!"

"No, no, my hat; and I paid three dollars for it yesterday."

"Charlie, may I put it in the fire?" I asked with a faltering voice. "It would soothe me inexpressibly to see it burn."

"Certainly, my dear; cook it in any way you please," he said, with such gravity that for a moment I stood there, alternately crying and laughing, making what Charlie called a pleasant little diversity. Then I carried the hat into the wash-room, and poured cold water upon it. When I returned Charlie had taken his place at the table; and I had just dished up the meat, and

Charlie had taken his first mouthful, when the bell rang.

"I declare to the tocsin!" cried Charlie; and when he said that I knew that something unusual had happened.

"What is it, my dear?" I asked with a face of dismay.

"I invited Inglehart to dinner; and, upon my word, I forgot it till this minute."

Words cannot express what I looked at that precise juncture. Charlie shook his head with a long-drawn sigh. For physical support he leaned hard upon his knife and fork, and his eyes wandered helplessly.

The door-bell rang again.

"My dear Elsa, your servants are not well trained," he said at last lugubriously, rising.

"My dear Charlie, you are the most provoking man I ever knew. Six potatoes, no pudding, and company for dinner!"

"Couldn't you manipulate that custard? He'd never know," said Charlie in a voice, that, angry as I was, set me to laughing.

"Hush! Go to the door, and stay up stairs in the parlor till I call you; and I religiously

hope that you'll have to go hungry, to punish you."

He went. I heard steps ascending; I felt that every blind was drawn, every shutter open. I knew that Charlie would make a point of pulling every tidy from every chair, and likely as not put his feet on the sofa; but those were things that vexed my soul no longer — not, at least, if I did not witness them: so I set about re-arranging my dinner.

Thanks to a law I had made early in my married life, the tablecloth did not need changing. There were apples in the house, which would do for dessert. There was also a little choice honey; but that I had mentally determined to keep for my sister's delectation, it was so exquisitely flavored. There were preserved peaches, and I contrived to get a little cream from my next-door neighbor. If I could only get Charlie's ear, and ask him not to expect another cup of coffee, — he had already drank one, — I need not make any more; indeed, there was really no time, for Charlie rarely spent over an hour at noon.

I changed my dress: my flushed face I could not change; and presently the dinner-bell rang them down.

Jack Inglehart was my husband's dearest friend, consequently I was very fond of him. A bachelor, a splendid fellow, six feet high, and just turned of thirty, I thought him, saving and excepting Charlie, the handsomest man in the world. He had a dark face; his features were clear cut, and, as Charlie used to say, blooded, or ancestrally handsome; and, unlike Charlie, his clothes suited him: whether old or new, black or gray, they always looked as if he had grown into them. He was of spare figure, broad-chested, light and elastic, and just the man to make an admirable hero.

"Jack," said Charlie, as they entered the dining-room, "here's a wife as is a wife. If you'll believe it, I had the ill-breeding to forget to send the 'devil' up to let her know that you were coming; and we'd just sat down to dinner when the bell rang first."

"O Charlie, Charlie!" was my mental apostrophe, "why need you have said a word about it?" and, if the thought had been a voice, he would have heard it in the next room, with the door shut.

"I'm really sorry, then," said Jack, his ease of manner deserting him. "I'm afraid I've put Mrs. Harman to some trouble."

"Pray don't think of it," said Mrs. Harman, speaking in her blandest tone, which, considering the boiling going on inside, was astonishingly to her credit.

"It's all right now," said Charlie, sitting down in high spirits: "you know we never dine off any thing but silver; and our cook, considering the salary she gets, is something quite astonishing. Mrs. Harman forgives you, or rather me; she has the serenity of an angel, and the tenacity too: you can't put her out. — My dear, another cup of coffee: I hope it's hot."

"Oh, yes," I said cheerfully, trying to catch his eye, keeping my glance upon him, so that a small stream of the brown liquid made its way to the tablecloth; but no, that husband of mine would not look at me. I wanted to telegraph that *that* cup was all he must ask for, in order to make the quantity hold out. The cream was low now, for I had taken a little out for the peaches; and I put in as scant measure as possible, giving him a most expressive glance as I handed him the cup, and making my lips pantomine the idea that he was to have no more.

"Eh?" said Charlie sharply, all attention.

I was instantly busy with the spoons.

"Beg pardon: I thought you were trying to tell me something," said Charlie, with the expression of an angel, but which was so *àpropos* that my cheeks, red before, were like living flames.

"By the way, Elsa dear, you haven't given me cream enough," he continued, stirring and stirring his coffee. "I'm very particular about my Mocha," he added, smiling innocently at Jack, whose cup was lavishly supplied: "if it isn't the right color, to a shade, I can't drink it at all. — Elsa," and over came the coffee to me, who had just made a most unchristian and uncharitable wish, *sotto voce*, that the liquid would scald him and so keep him still. Reluctantly I poured out a few drops, looking intently in his eyes.

"Oh, I see! you haven't got enough;" and he nodded his head sagely, as who should say, "Give me credit for sagacity."

This was the drop too much: I could have cried heartily then and there. I was sure then that Jack would never ask for a second cup, or accept one if it was tendered him; and my fears proved true. In vain I said there was great plenty — one of those polite little lies that I dare say originated

with Mother Eve when she was housekeeping: Jack very politely declined; and mentally I shook my hand clinched at that husband of mine.

What led me to apologize when I served out the peaches is known only to those tricksy sprites who manipulate the tongues of women when the head is not on guard.

"Oh, by the way, too good to tell!" roared Charlie. "Elsa had a splendid custard made: what do you suppose it was seasoned with?" and he laughed heartily.

"Pray, Charlie," said I, feeling desperate.

"Oh! it's nothing you could help, my dear. — You know, Jack, there are people, who, when they do a good thing, sometimes put their foot in it, as the saying is: well, unluckily for my wife's custard, I put my hat in it, eh? joke, eh? good joke! Now, some women would have got mad, eh? serve me right, too; but Elsa, oh! she only wanted to burn the hat, you know."

Jack's laugh was rather faint. I'm afraid he saw the tears gather near my eyes. As for Charlie, I dare not say what I couldn't have done to him at that moment. At another time I might have laughed; but my troubles had been gradually

accumulating, till now the burden had actually rolled upon my heart and made me weak.

"O Jack, I want you — Elsa, is there any of that honey left?" asked Charlie, bland as a summer sky, turning to me.

It was on my lips to say "No," as it was not possible to annihilate that dreadful man; but, as I had never yet told a lie with the saintly composure of countenance which custom imparts, I knew that voice and face would betray me. At the risk of losing the esteem of my gentle and Christian reader, I will confess that I did absolutely at that moment wish there were any possible means of prevarication that would save that honey, with which I so longed to be able to treat my sister at her first meal. But Charlie's eye was upon me.

"Yes, I believe there's a — a little," I answered, sacrificing the paring of the nail of the truth; and I think I mystified Charley, for he stared and stared at the changes of which I felt my face guilty.

"Let's have it, dear. — Jack, it's the best honey you ever tasted; you can't get it in this part of the country. I have a friend, Ned Talbot, who has a fine ranch out in Santa Barbara, and he sent it me.

The flowers there, it seems, impart a peculiar aroma. — Thank you, love," as I put it in his hand with a vindictive desire that it might make him sick. "Now, Jack, if you taste of this, you won't stop at a taste: try that."

And they didn't stop at a taste: they cleaned the dish — the great —

But stay! I must not allow my pen to run away with me.

Suffice it to add that dinner came to an end. I wonder if I am sillier than most women; for when Charlie and Jack went out, and Jack tramped up stairs for his hat, after I had said a final good-by, I just sat down, put a handkerchief to my eyes, and cried like a school-girl.

Charlie found me so when he came in, as he always did, to kiss me good-by.

"Why, little woman, what's the matter?" he asked.

I made dumb show for him to be silent.

"Jack can't hear: he's on the door-step," said Charlie, *sotto voce.*

"I don't care: only go, go! leave me to myself," I sobbed.

"But what's the matter? what have I done?

Ain't you going to let me kiss you? Are you tired?"

"No, no! I don't want you to kiss me — no matter — go, will you — go!" and I stamped like a virago.

"Very well: if you see me brought home on a shutter" — solemnly.

"I don't care: go!" I reiterated; and then I felt my hair slowly rise. What had I said? should I run after him? What would all Green Street say? a woman flying after her husband with dishevelled hair, red eyes, and a dishcloth in her hand! But then the terrible picture that assailed my fancy, — Charlie's tall figure brought in between strangers! Oh, dear! and I had impiously said I didn't care. What would become of me? How should I get through the rest of the day? Charley's last words, last look, would haunt me. And, after all, what had the poor fellow done? Surely he could wash his hands in innocency, while I, perhaps, had cancelled every Christian virtue that I had prided myself on possessing.

Poor human nature! — so happy but a brief hour ago, so rapturously happy, and now bowed down

under the veriest straws, unkind, unhappy, and unchristian.

For some moments I waited, hoping that he would come back; but I waited in vain.

Chapter Two.

AN hour before Charlie's arrival, it seemed to me that I had hardly ever been happier in all my life. My soul felt "capacious and serene" in its new joy. Lina was coming at last. In my hand I held her letter.

"DEAR ELSA, — At last the long-promised visit shall be paid. In October, the month of ripe grapes and red leaves, you will find me at your door. And I am not coming as one of the hopeless, this time, although I am close on to twenty-eight. You have no idea how young I have grown since Nathan married and took his three children home. I miss them very much, having had the oversight of them since Ad. was six. I have been weighed down with mountains of care; but now all is smooth and pleasant, and I intend to enjoy myself. If you have any gentlemen friends — but what nonsense! consider it unwritten. I'll tell you why when I come. Till that happy time, adieu."

There were some expressions in this brief mis-

sive that took me by surprise; but I was too happy to speculate upon their meaning. All I could think of was, that Lina was coming. The time, too, was auspicious. The fall cleaning was over. Charlie had bought me a beautiful new Brussels carpet for my parlor; and the bay-window and clinging plants and hanging flower baskets that adorned my sitting-room gave an air of peculiar comfort, and even elegance, to that apartment.

To crown all, Charlie's salary had been raised; and our little home world rejoiced in the sunlight of prosperity, so that our minds were bright and elastic, and the present and the future seemed assured.

I longed for Charlie to come home, that I might impart the good news. You should know Charlie; everybody should know Charlie: indeed, I am writing this little book for the express purpose of making the world acquainted with Charlie. Not that he is by any means remarkable; but he has the fewest faults, the manliest virtues, and the least tact, of any man I ever saw, knew, or heard of.

I married him, first because he was handsome, and secondly because he was good. I know I should not set the physical superiority over the

moral one; but how should I have ever known of his virtue if I had not first been attracted by his face? There are gray hairs in the curls now, and the most delicate lines scarcely visible, but still there, radiating from the corners of his pleasant dark eyes; but — shall I confess it? — though many changing years have passed since we joined hands for life, at the altar, where he made all the responses at exactly the wrong places, and let the wedding-ring slip through his fingers from sheer nervousness, and it took two groomsmen just fifteen consecutive minutes to find it, while the minister fidgeted and the whole congregation smiled audibly, yet with all his faults I love him still.

"Charlie's a good boy, but he's pecooliar," said old granny Harman, sitting so straight in her ninety-five years, and her Scotch muslin cap, and seeming to my seventeen years a sort of compromise between a statue and a mummy.

"He was always in trouble, from that high up," and she held her shaking hand a foot from the floor. "But then, Charlie's so good!" she added, with a queer little smile, "an' I doot if his wife will ever see a fault in him."

I never did, of course; but then, as she said, I *have* found him "pecoolier."

Aveline, or Lina as my sister was always called, had not made a long visit for years. Sometimes, on her way to the mountains for a summer resort with my brother Nathan's motherless children, she would stop for a few hours. She was a bright, beautiful, winsome girl, looking much younger than her years, full of life, vivacious, ingenious, witty, and gentle as a fawn. We were so fond of each other, Lina and I! and she was the one thing in the world that I was proud of, except my husband.

During the interim we had corresponded regularly; and her letters were good enough to be printed, Charlie said, as indeed they were. To my comprehension, Madame Sévigné's were tame in comparison.

For several years she had been tied to the cares of housekeeping and children, bravely taking the place of my brother's wife in the ordering of his home, superintending all the domestic concerns, and devoting her time to the training of his three boys.

Now she was coming to make us a long visit, just as long as suited us to keep her. I knew

what her visits meant, — less care and work for myself, household ornamentations, pretty gifts, more time for visits and amusement, all the sewing in the house nicely done and packed away, jolly evenings, plenty of music, my spring outfit cut and made, my old bonnet trimmed in style, myself rejuvenated; laughter, industry, sunshine, and beauty added to the daily life, and sweetness to the daily bread.

I ran up stairs, round the house, and in my lady's chamber, on a tour of inspection. Lina should have the best room, in my eyes a miracle of neatness and elegance. Every thing was ready. The shams that I had embroidered with my own hands, and also fluted with my own particular digits, reposed in their snowy beauty on the downy pillows of the best bed. All the little dainty fixings of the toilet-glass, used on company days, I took from their boxes, and ranged about the bureau. Tidies, mottoes, rugs, bottles, china, marble, were speckless and spotless. I triumphed in the possession of a spare room that was, in my eyes, perfection itself.

"The last time Lina was here," I said to the smiling personage who looked at me from the

mirror with a rather flushed face, "there was no carpet on this floor; a pine wash-stand, a deal table, a single cottage bedstead, and odd pieces of china bought at an auction store, completed the meagre furnishing." Now behold the contrast! For the wife of a poor old sub-editor, it strikes me as being very grand indeed; and Lina will see that we are coming up in the world. Then there's the parlor!"

Down stairs I ran, like a child eager for its play-things, and opened the door of that cherished apartment. The blinds were down, the shutters half closed. An agreeable twilight tone softened the atmosphere, in which the clear, bright colors of the carpet, whose combination made at once warmth and variety, shone as under a veil; and the pretty trifles, the lace curtains, the gray sofa and chairs, the mantle-mirror framed in rosewood, my particular pet and pride (had I not dispensed with the aid of a servant for many months, that I might possess that long-coveted article?), matched so artistically with the slaty-gray paper dashed with Indian red!

How pleased Lina would be with these signs of

our prosperity! I could see her brown eyes glisten. I could hear her eager comments. And yet that husband of mine was ignorant of her coming.

Chapter Three.

HOW anxiously I waited for the clock to strike six, I need not describe. Fearful forebodings of that shutter, imaginings of direful disaster, a desire to throw myself into Charlie's arms and confess all my wickedness, and an occasional nullifying reminder that I should in a measure put it in his power to remind me of my weakness in all time to come, kept me in a state of mental effervescence that prevented me from either resting or working with any comfort.

I therefore put my penitence in the shape of a clean tablecloth, and all the delicacies I knew he loved for supper, and, when the door-bell rang at the usual hour, went to the door with a beating heart and a smiling countenance — to meet little Thorn, the office-boy, with a note which ran thus: —

"DEAR LITTLE WOMAN, — Send by bearer my cane and ulster. Dick Blake bought a ticket for Nilsson, and you

know how we were longing to see her. Dick's wife, however, is sick: so he has given me an invite. Ordinary flesh and blood could not resist the temptation, so I am going. The best of it is, I know you will be glad, for you remember you almost insisted that I should buy a ticket, because we couldn't well afford two. I send with this a letter from the old lady, which, after reading, please put away for safe keeping."

The ulster and cane were forthcoming; and I sent them by little Thorn, in no enviable frame of mind. I had pictured to myself such a happy evening, and plenty of leisure to talk about Lina, and make arrangements for her future comfort; and I was doomed to remain at home, and fancy the wonderful things to which Charlie, for one or two brief hours, might be transported from this work-a-day world. Not that I envied Charlie this unexpected treat; though, of the two, I was the best judge and lover of music, and, if other matters had gone off as smoothly as ordinary, I should have felt a downright pleasure in his absence, and betaken myself to my book or my piano practice. I promptly subdued the rebellion going on in my mind, however, and with Aunt Jack's letter in my hand marched into the little sitting-room, and from thence to the dining-room, where I ate my supper in dignified silence, having no one to talk to.

Aunt Jack's letter was reserved for my leisure. It wanted still nearly an hour to gas-light; and, after my small modicum of work had been done, I sat down to its perusal.

Aunt Jack lived in the West: the Far West it was when she first went out from the civilization and splendor of a New York experience to the savage borders of the wilderness.

Her luxurious home, one of the most beautiful in all the metropolis, passed into the hands of her husband's creditors; for she would keep nothing back, though she in law had an undoubted right to protect herself. The change from a petted, envied existence, to the then almost barbarous life of the frontier, must have been appalling: yet she bore it unflinchingly, and kept up her correspondence with a few friends, while she helped with her own hands to fashion the rude log hut they had to put up for shelter. It was a treat to read one of Aunt Jack's letters, no less because the log house had become a palatial residence, and Uncle Jack the governor of his State.

Judge of my astonishment therefore, when opening the letter, not taking notice of the envelope, I found a sheet of rough foolscap, folded after the

fashion of a country clown, and written coarsely over in an unsteady hand.

"What can have happened?" I thought: "something is the matter, and Aunt Jack has employed some rough amanuensis;" and I commenced to read.

"DEAR OLD CHARLIE-BOY, — Mattie is now as bright as ever, and twice as beautiful. We fairly rave over her. You know how you admired her a few months ago. I am sure you would adore her now, the darling! She is waiting, dressed in the newest fashion, for your approval. I am not certain whether we shall let you kiss her, or not, though for past favors I don't know but you have the best right. She has not forgotten your floral gifts, neither have we. The night we took her to the theatre you remember: I shall never forget it. I should like to see her dressed in that style again. She was first then, you know, and had no rival: she is first still in our estimation, and so she may be still, I trust, in yours. Say the best you can for her; and, if you can come down to-night early, I promise you shall see your own face reflected in hers, for I know she must be fond of you. There! don't laugh at my ravings: you see I am as crack-brained as ever over Mattie; but I will allow you a little corner in her affections, because you have always stood up for her so manfully. Expect you to-night: there's to be a supper and a jolly set-to. Don't fail.

Yours, E. HASTINGS."

My dominant impulse on reading this letter was to scream. If my hair had been down, I should have pulled it lustily in the most approved tragic style. Could it be possible, — such a letter addressed to my Charlie, and bearing internal evidence that he was a pleased recipient? For a few moments I sat there like a dumb woman. Then I re-read it, word for word, over and over. Who was Mattie? I knew no Mattie, did not remember ever having heard of any Mattie. When had he found time to visit her? In all our married life he had spent so few evenings away from home. Might there not be some mistake? No: the same handwriting on the back of the envelope, —

CHARLIE G. HARMAN,
AT OFFICE ROOMS OF "REGULATOR."

It had certainly been addressed to my husband. My heart swelled with a sense of injury, and still I would not accuse my Charlie: it was purely impossible that he could thus deceive me. And yet my very resolution not to doubt had the effect of increasing my irritation. Where was Charlie? had he really gone with his friend to hear Nilsson? Could this be a covert invitation to the same place? Was Nilsson's name Mattie? Looking at it in

every imaginable phase, I could not shift the difficulty.

"O Charlie!" I cried, with a great sob, and then dashed the tears angrily away, as if every one were a burning doubt that had no right to be harbored there. Then I walked the floor, and pressed my hands together, and ejaculated fragments of sentences, and blamed Charlie, and despised myself for blaming him, and did every silly, passionate thing that women do under circumstances of sudden trial.

"I had a great deal rather he would die," I said chokingly; "but then, I won't think of it; I won't believe it." And I sat down, and pictured it all out in blacker colors than before.

With all the sense of horror that had been forced upon me by the reading of this letter not intended for my eyes, but substituted, in Charlie's careless fashion, for Aunt Jack's delightfully effusive epistle, there was a minor sense which I cannot describe, that was compounded of curiosity and a longing for revenge. Who Mattie was, and whether she was handsome, I would have given the world to know. That she should in some way be punished, was a self-evident fact; and not till I

perceived that my inclinations were growing unmistakably murderous, did I rouse myself from a pained revery, and with clinched hands vow that I would not let it trouble me any more. My resolution was taken. I would not act like a jealous, disappointed wife; I would not even let Charlie know I had seen the letter. And more, I would array myself in my finest habiliments, and go over to Mrs. Rattlin's opposite. She had begged for an evening visit; and they were all gay over there, — too gay, Charlie thought.

The Rattlins were bright, handsome, fashionable people. There were five of them, — Mr. and Mrs. Rattlin, married folks; one maiden Rattlin, a pretty girl; and two bachelor Rattlins, high-spirited, good-looking fellows, who had tried their best to get up an intimacy with Charlie, and failed.

What! stay at home, and mope, and such agreeable people within a stone's-throw? I thought, as I half smiled at my flushed face in the mirror, where I stood, arranging my hair in the most becoming fashion, *not* as Charlie liked it. Never! and I brought out my finery with the resolution to be pitiless, not only towards my own grief, but his likes and dislikes. "He says I am pretty, mag-

netic, attractive: now we'll see," I said to myself, "how his honor will like the tables turned;" and I muttered with a singing, quavering voice that belied my worst intentions,

"I'll be no submissive wife."

A shining figure smiled back at me when I could smile, — a bright, saucy, fierce little face, rising out of the soft gray and white lustres that Charlie thought so becoming; but I choked back all thoughts of Charlie, and descended to the sitting-room, armed and equipped for conquest.

I had thrown my white wraps about me, preparatory to sallying out, when the bell rang. Throwing off my burnous, I went to the door, — for, as Charlie often playfully remarked, our servants were not well trained; and there stood Jack Inglehart. He looked at me with visible admiration as I drew back, feeling the color come into my cheeks; but he entered rather timidly, doubtless imagining that I had dressed myself in his honor; for the first thing he said, on reaching the parlor, was, —

"Why, isn't Charlie at home?"

"No, Jack: he has gone to see Mattie," I replied with feigned composure.

"I beg your pardon;" and he stood irresolutely.

"Gone to hear Miss Nilsson, I mean," I added, with a laugh. "A very charming singer, isn't she?"

"Oh, very! but I thought — that is, I understood Charlie to say that he wanted me to step in on a little matter of business; so — I — came."

"Oh, it's all right!" I said flippantly: "when you have known Charlie as well as I have, you will learn not to have so much faith" — I put a fierce restraint upon my tongue. What! was I to forswear my wifely allegiance on mere suspicion? for a visionary defection should I allow this man to think ill of my husband? I hastened to correct myself.

"Charlie forgets easily. He has not the best memory in the world, you know; and then the calls of his profession are very exacting. I don't wonder sometimes that they drive every thing out of his head. But pray stay," I added: "I am all alone, and it will be a favor. Shall I give you some music?"

He acquiesced willingly; and I rattled off a few waltzes, then sat down by him, and talked of any thing, every thing, that came into my head, but

chiefly of my sister, expatiating upon the pleasant time I meant to have; while all the time an undercurrent of bitter feeling kept sending the hot blood to my cheeks.

"Do you resemble your sister?" he asked, during a pause in the conversation, with what I thought a rather admiring glance.

"Oh, no!" and I felt myself withdrawing: "sister Lina is the beauty of the family," was my rejoinder.

The door opened, and in walked Mrs. Nettleton, my next-door neighbor. She has a key that unlocks the garden-gate and the side-door, and sometimes avails herself of the permission given her to come, in case of any little domestic emergency, to make a neighborly call, and chat with me.

Though a person of considerable influence, she is by no means cultured or careful; and her first words fell upon my ears with startling emphasis.

"Good Lord! here you are courting, and I thought you were all alone. Oh! it ain't your husband! well, I'm sure I ask ten thousand pardings," she added as she came in sight of Jack. "Why, you're dressed as fine as a fiddle. Well, I won't disturb you: two's company, three's none."

"Pray don't go, Mrs. Nettleton: let me make you acquainted with a friend of my husband, Mr. Inglehart."

"Oh! 'tisn't a friend of yours, then," she said with her terrible laugh. "Much pleased, sir, I'm sure, but I didn't intend making a company call. My old man is grunting with the rheumatiz, and nothing will do but he must have a mustard-plaster; and I'm all out of mustard, for I never eat it, and Cross-sticks seldom." (Cross-sticks was the playful name she had invented for Mr. Nettleton.) "So I was going to ask you. Now just tell me where it is, for I'm O K in these premises, and I won't steal your spoons or your sugar."

"But it is locked up, and my keys are down stairs," I said, longing to pilot her out of the room.

"Oh, of course! — Mr. Riddlecart, don't never marry a woman that's painfully neat. It's a real relief to get into my own house, and count the cobwebs, after I've been here. Besides, you can't make a neighbor of her, for she keeps every thing locked up; and closed cupboards ain't my definition for neighborliness. But my goodness gracious! there's Cross-sticks making up such faces,

and me staying to gabble! Good-night, Mr. Riddlecart," and she followed me down stairs.

I stood irresolute after she had gone. Her coming had thrown an additional weight on my spirits.

Chapter Four.

SHE will tell all the neighbors.

That was the fear that kept the blood in my cheeks, so that I actually dreaded to go up stairs again. The miserable consciousness that I had been found alone with a strange gentleman, dressed in my best, and in so near proximity that she had charged us with courting, took away what little ease of mind I had left.

As I slowly entered the parlor, Jack was turning over the leaves of the "Selections from Favorite Operas," and finally found one, which he professed himself ready to sing with me, for it was a duet. He, being near-sighted, leaned over my shoulder; and while we were closing the song in a rather colorless manner, for I could not forget myself, the door opened again, and there stood that husband of mine.

"O Charlie!" I cried impulsively, and then

turned ice-cold, and gave him most stately greeting.

"Why, Puggie, how pretty you look! what are you dressed up so for? Ah! I see," and he turned to Jack, laughing: "she never rigs herself in that fashion for me, nowadays."

"I thought you went to hear Nilsson," I said, going to the back of the room, and sitting down.

"So I did; but it occurred to me that without you the affair was flat, stale, unprofitable. So on purely philosophical grounds, I couldn't enjoy the music, because, don't you see? there was only half of me there. And then I happened to remember that I told Jack to come down this evening; and, on the whole, I wasn't comfortable: so here I am."

I longed to ask him how he had left Mattie. The sight of him at so unexpected an hour seemed to bite in the cruel thought that had assailed the outer walls of that jealous nature which I had never before suspected myself of possessing. But there it was, — the creature with the poison fangs and the green eyes.

"Come, Puggie," — the name had amused me before, but now it annoyed me, — "give us some music before we settle down to business."

"Excuse me, Charlie," I said, in a voice that sounded strange to myself. "Mr. Inglehart must be tired of my poor performance."

"I didn't ask you to play for Inglehart," he still continued playfully, — "not exclusively. I want to hear something."

"What, after Nilsson! No, indeed; and, if you will excuse me, I will leave you to finish your business together," I said, rising, and moving to the door. I felt that I could not sit there much longer with that oppressive sense of injury battling with my better self.

"So you won't play for us, and you won't stay with us: are you ill?" he asked, his tone altering. I shook my head, and made an ignominious retreat; for I felt that I could not bear his eye and his questions much longer. I wanted to get by myself, and cry it out. I made what show I could of decency, by turning bravely at the door, and trying to laugh good-by to Jack; but by the time I was outside my cheeks were wet.

Charlie opened the door — came out.

"See here, little woman," he said, "can't you forgive and forget?" But I rushed up stairs like the wind; and I thought he muttered something it

might not be pleasant to hear, as he turned again; and then the door shut to heavily.

With a sense of relief I began to throw off my finery. It was evident Charlie thought I still held the resentment engendered by the trouble at dinner; and I was quite willing he should.

The next morning I awoke with a dull sense of some injury tugging at my heart. Imagination opened her tired wings again; and I turned away from Charlie's unconscious face with a thrill of anger, and a determination that I would do my duty, no matter how beautiful Mattie might be, or how often she lured him from my side.

It was scarcely light yet, but I could not sleep; and with mulish obstinacy, worthy of a woman, I went down stairs one hour before the time, lighted the gas, and the fire laid the night before, and then sat down, folded my hands one over the other, and thought and thought.

It was a dark morning. The rain blew against the windows, the wind was high, now and then a cloud of smoke puffed out of the stove. For how many years, for how many mornings in all those years, had I thus made of myself a servant, for the sake of the man I loved! I had pinched

and economized, that we might pay for the neat little house in which we had begun our happy married life; and now one disloyal action had made work, life itself, repugnant to me. My worse, imperious self asserted its right to complain, to despise, to hate the author of this sickening repulsion that I now felt for the first time in my life. I sat and mused in bitterness, until I heard Charlie's step on the stairs. Then I stirred myself, and longed for wings that I might fly away and be at rest.

The fire burned cheerily, the kettle was singing and puffing, the aroma of the coffee escaped on the air; but the table was not yet set. In vain I tried to raise the ghost of a smile to welcome my husband: I could scarcely have done it if my life had been at stake. I felt the lines growing hard in my face, and my hands spasmodically clinching now and again.

He evidently was not sure of his reception; for, as he came in, he avoided my eye, and pushed aside something that impeded his passage with an impatient movement. If there had been a cat there, perhaps he would have kicked it: I don't know.

"Coffee smells good!" he said, rubbing his hands.

No answer.

"Cold morning; nasty walk down town."

Complete silence. Then with an explosive voice, "I say, little woman, couldn't you *swear* something?"

It was the old, inimitable manner, and my frigid lips almost parted in a smile.

"Don't keep a fellow in ice longer than you can help," he shivered, spreading his hands out to the blaze. "I thought that shutter would do the business yesterday: I'll contrive to make it a door this time. I'm sure I'm all in the dark yet, as to what I offended you about. I suppose it was asking poor Jack to dinner."

"I don't care any thing about that," I managed to mutter.

"Don't peep like a sick canary: give good wholesome vowels. I'd rather hear Mrs. Nettleton's eloquent Billingsgate, almost. Come, now: didn't you like it because I went to hear Nilsson? speak out, because I didn't like it myself."

"*Did* you go to hear Nilsson?" I asked bluntly.

"Did I — go — to hear — Nilsson? Why, didn't you get my note?"

"Y—es."

"Well, then, why in the name of the century-plant do you ask me if I went to hear Nilsson? Where were your ears last night, my dear? You certainly heard me say that I went, and that I was not pleased to stay there without you."

Ah! but that was not it: the letter, — the letter that I would die before I would show him, — that was the direful cause. I felt my lips tremble, and my eyes were hot.

"I feel as mean as a dog without any tail to wag," he went on, "with you in the doldrums. Come, give me my coffee, and let me go! Oh, by the way, what does Aunt Jack say?"

This was the last straw. I turned my face away to wipe my eyes.

"No bad news, I hope," he went on. "I didn't read it myself, I was in such a hurry to get off some items. Hey — what? Why, little woman!"

"I didn't — didn't get — get Aunt Jack's let— letter," I sobbed, thoroughly broken down.

"Didn't! why, I sent it."

"N—no, you didn't: you s—sent another."

"Another!" there was a long pause: Charlie was turning his pockets inside out. "Why, to be

sure! here's old aunty's valuable epistle; and, let me see — why, I must have sent you" — an ominous pause — "Hastings's letter; well, yes, I did."

"Yes, that's the name; all — a—about — Mattie, the horrid thing!"

A light seemed just then to break upon Charlie's mind. He is not quick-witted for nothing. He sprang to his feet.

"I declare to the tocsin!" and then he laughed. I am not quite sure but he yelled; I think he did, to the accompaniment of boot-heels, — a good way, I thought, to brave it out.

"I'm a precious noodle: let me see that letter," he said, the tears of excessive hilarity rolling down his cheeks. I slowly and somewhat reluctantly procured the letter. He read it, all the time laughing in an undertone; then I felt myself clasped by two strong arms, and drawn slowly to a favorite resting-place.

"What did you think of it, dear, and of me? But, ha, ha! let me laugh a little, though I can imagine;" and on came another fit of laughter, which he tried to smother in my neck. "Why, little woman, who do you suppose Mattie is? Look up here; prepare to be astonished. Mattie is —

is — a STEAM-ENGINE! Oh, fie, fie, little woman! jealous of a steam-engine!"

It was my turn now to hide my head, to cling close, close to the heaving chest.

"How did I know?" I sobbed.

"To be sure; how did you know? That addle-pate Hastings is the foreman, or something, of the finest department in town, and he idolizes the great brass-mounted creature: she was christened Mattie, after his wife. Don't you remember the time they had a jollification in the *National*, and I sent out to grandfather's for flowers enough to decorate two steam-engines? That's what he means. O my sweet little Elsa! it would take more than a fire-engine, if she *is* a beauty, to drive me away from you. So — and you meant to turn the tables on me, woman fashion! That's why you were so stunningly got up for Jack."

"I wasn't got up for Jack," I made quick reply. "How did I know Jack was coming? No, it was worse than that."

"What do you mean, my dear?" queried Charlie, with an anxious face.

"I dressed to go over to see the Rattlins."

He looked grave.

"I'm glad you didn't, little woman. Ned Rattlin was in all the papers yesterday for forging papers to a large amount. I'm afraid you would have found them sorry company. As for Mattie, Hastings wanted me to puff her, as I did before I left the office. I didn't want to go to their supper: I'd a thousand times rather stay here at home with you. Why, you little witch, didn't I leave Nilsson for you?" and— But no matter: imagine the making-up.

Chapter Five.

IT was just the time to tell him of Lina's expected visit, which I did between sips of coffee. I was really too happy to eat, now that tormenting vision had gone. I think I dreamed three successive nights of a steam-engine that made horrible faces at me.

Charlie was delighted.

"We're nicely in trim for company," he said, "and we'll have no end of good times. There's Jack, too, poor lonesome old bach: how grand! we can hunt in couples. I'll put a flea in his ear."

"Charlie!" said I.

"Three exclamation points! what's up now?"

"Charlie," said I again, with solemn emphasis, "do you want to spoil every thing?"

"I'm not aware of any such beatific intention," said Charlie, looking blank.

"Then don't you say one word to Jack: leave him to me."

"Humph!" muttered Charlie, "and find him leaning on your shoulder. Don't think I'm blind, little woman. Jack's all very well, but he's exceedingly human, and he thinks you a paragon."

"Then what will he think of Lina? for you know in good looks there's no comparison. But indeed he didn't lean on my shoulder: he's only near-sighted, and stooped over to see."

"Yes, yes, I understand. But time flies. When is Lina expected?"

"This day week. We're to meet her at the depot at six, P.M."

"All right. Now give me a kiss, little woman, and promise me you'll never be jealous again."

"It will be utterly impossible," I made reply: "whether I can say as much for you, remains to be seen;" and, with this laughing rejoinder on my side, we parted good friends.

It rained still, but my little home was full of heart-sunshine again; what did I care? My trials were few, my duties pleasant, my husband loved me, and Lina was coming. I ran hither and thither, happy as the bird that sang in my window, in spite of the clouds and the rain.

When I went up stairs a momentary depression seized me. Charlie, in lieu of the towels which I had forgotten to spread on the rack, had snatched from the drawer two of my finest and largest tidies, that had never yet been used, and, mistaking them for towels in the dusk, had rubbed them into shapelessness. There they lay on the wash-stand, appealing mutely in their soiled beauty. I did feel a little pang at sight of their condition, and gave a passing thought to that husband of mine, that was not as complimentary as it might have been.

Perhaps, when I saw a sealed packet on the bureau, labelled, —

"FOR MY LITTLE WOMAN," —

and opening it found a new, bright, crisp, ten-dollar bill, looking me innocently in the face, I did feel a heart-beat or so of reproach. It was so like a man to think of money as a restorer of good-will, and yet so kind and thoughtful of him! I put it with the little store we are saving for a rainy day, trusting that that hour may be far, far in the future, yet feeling with the poet that —

"Some days must be dark and dreary."

Making good use of my time, I enlisted Jack in

Lina's favor, and that without guile; for I could think and talk of nothing else. Jack had his weak points in common with all humanity; and one of them was his admiration of very young girls. It was a childish fondness, I see now, bordering strongly on the parental, fostering temperament of the man; but then it troubled me, for I had set my heart on having Jack for a brother-in-law. And my many ruminations, coupled with the pleasure he seemed to experience in our little home, tended to convince me that he would only have to look at Lina, to see her at her best, and to listen to her sensible, sprightly, and at times witty comments, to become strongly interested in her. It may be judged, then, whether I did not have a trying ordeal on the night before that in which she was expected to be with us.

Jack and Charlie were sitting on either side of a small table, preparing for a game of backgammon. The evening was cool, and I had built up a cosey fire on the hearth, so that the sparkle of the leaping flame, the brass andirons whose huge tops shone like balls of fire, the gas-lights softened and broadened by falling through a globe of clear water, the deep rich colors of the carpet, made our

humble room a very paradise of light and comeliness. I was busy stewing oysters, in a social way, over the fire, and had just brought in a small pile of dishes, and deposited them on a table near by. Fortunately Jack sat with his back toward me, while Charlie opposite him faced me. The click of the dice in their wooden boxes made an harmonious accompaniment to the crackle and snap of the fire.

"Doublets, three goes!" cried Charlie. "Never happened before, did it, little woman? and all sixes. Why, it carries me nearly out! I shall beat this time, old boy, sure as fate."

"All right," answered Jack: "it will be the first time. Fate ought to be good to you once."

"I'm sure it's not skill," Charlie made reply. "I'll tell you what! When Lina comes, we can have a hand at whist; eh, Jack? — Little woman, the oysters smell good. — Yes, and Lina used to play an excellent hand. By the way, how long is it since she has been here? 'Twas, if I remember rightly, in 18 — When was it, Elsa?"

"1870," I said, almost gasping, and trying to catch his eye desperately.

"So it was, — the year we came from Boston. Lina's no chicken" —

A cry from the cook, which startled both men to their feet.

"What's the matter? burnt yourself?" ejaculated Charlie, rising, and coming towards me.

I gave him a look that ought to have stabbed him to the heart, and at the same time held on my finger. I had been building such a delightful little castle, in which Lina was the sole mistress; and now to have that husband of mine calculating Lina's age, — it was too bad! Not that I would have deceived anybody for the world; but I wanted Jack to see her before any such matter-of-fact considerations came on the carpet.

"Please get me a little cold water, Charlie," I said; and out he went dutifully. I knew it would take him some minutes to find a goblet, and some others to get at the pump.

"Excuse me, Mr. Inglehart," I said, "Charlie is so long!" And out I flew to hurry — perhaps to harry — that husband of mine.

"Charlie, I don't want the water, but I *do* want you to hold your tongue!" I said angrily. "You are determined to upset every thing."

"Pray, what is spilled now?" he asked.

"Your common sense. What in the world did

you want to speak of Lina's age for? You know how such things sometimes influence a man."

"O-h! then you didn't burn your finger? You miserable little hypocrite! I'll pity you again in a hurry, I guess."

"But why will you be so imprudent?"

"And how about you, Mrs. Elsa? What is burning now, I wonder?"

The oysters!

I rushed back, but it was too late. The stew was utterly spoiled; and Jack was complacently stirring the fire, quite oblivious of the horrid compound he was brewing.

"Your fire was almost out," he said.

"I wish it had been quite," was my rejoinder, with a touch of temper; for Charlie was laughing in the doorway, and nothing was more dreadful to me than that.

"Is our savory mess to be given to the dogs?" queried Charlie nonchalantly, "because I'm hungry."

By this time I was out of the room with my spoiled dish; and when I came back, heroically determined to make the best of it, Charlie was gone, and Jack sat reading the paper.

"I hope you're not very fond of oysters," I said to Jack. I was sure Charlie had been bragging about my stews.

"I *am* fonder of some things," he said, smilingly, — "for instance, of music. Does your sister sing?"

"Much better than I do;" and, once launched on my favorite topic, I was happy, though secretly wondering where Charlie had gone.

"Here you are, little woman;" and my husband made his appearance, followed by a tall mulatto bearing in his hand a tin can.

"Just off the fire," he said, as he dismissed the waiter. "I like to do things in style: you'll perceive *my* oysters are not burned," and he turned them into the dish, spattering every thing, including my new dress, with the gravy. However, he was so pleased with his impromptu treat, that I could not find it in my heart to say one word. So we ate our oysters in peace, and were happy.

Chapter Six.

"MIND, at six, Charlie!" was my parting sentence.

"I'll be on time, Elsa. I'm quite as anxious to see Lina as you can be, though I'm only half a relation."

I had decided not to go to the depot. In the first place, I was not well; and in the second, as we kept no servant, I wanted to make the place cheerful for her arrival, which would not happen till after gaslight.

My house was in order from garret to cellar; my anticipations were of the most exalted kind, and there was nothing to disturb my beatific enjoyment until discord entered in the shape of Mrs. Nettleton.

She came through the kitchen way as usual.

"Well, Harman, I expect you feel as slick as a kitten," was her elegant salutation, — "at peace

with all the world and the rest of mankind. What were you and your husband quarrelling about last night?"

"Quarrelling! what do you mean?" I asked, in surprise.

"Why, I heard you in my room. Such stamping and shouting! 'What do you say now?' says Cross-sticks: 'there's your model couple, fighting like cats and dogs.' I tried to listen, but I couldn't make any thing out. You see I'm frank."

"I see: frankness is your redeeming feature. I'm much obliged that you came to me first. The quarrelling was this: Charlie was taking off Fechter, now I remember, and did rant for half an hour or so, while I personated Juliet. I think the laughing might have redeemed us from that horrible suspicion."

"There's a good story spoiled," said that aggravating woman. "I was really and truly in hope that you were having a regular family broil. I can't bear everlastingly good people: there's a screw loose somewhere."

"One don't need to fight in order to prove that one is human," I said.

"No, I s'pose not: it breaks out in different

ways with different people. Now, when I found you mooning on the sofa with that nice friend of your husband's, who comes here a great deal too often" —

"Mrs. Nettleton!" I said, rising explosively, "there are some things I won't tolerate, even in my own house, even from a friend; and that is one of them. Do you dare to insinuate that there is any thing wrong in Mr. Inglehart's visiting this house? Can't my husband invite his friends here, without some miserable gossip making scandal about it?"

"So it seems," said my neighbor quietly.

"Why! have you heard anybody speak of it?" I further queried.

"Plenty," was her provoking reply. "Has it ever occurred to you that you are rather pretty?"

"But who have you heard speak of it?" I persisted angrily.

"Why, it was only yesterday Miss Smith asked me who that handsome man was who came here every night."

"He doesn't come every night."

"I was only telling what Miss Smith said," replied that exasperating woman. "And Sam Long

said that Charlie had better keep his eyes open, for there was evidently a flirtation going on; and Mrs. Preston" —

"Stop," I said, breathless: "I won't have another word. Yes, but I will: what did you tell them when you heard such scandalous speeches?"

"I told them I never knew a pretty woman that didn't like to have her husband's friends admire her," she said mercilessly.

"Then you thought so too."

"Yes, I thought he admired you."

"And are men and women all alike? is their standard so low?"

"There's pretty much of a muchness," remarked Mrs. Nettleton. "Perhaps it's because we're not pretty, and haven't any particular Jacks, — we in the street, — I can't say, — and maybe we all wish we had: the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. I'm sure when Cross-sticks gets in his tantrums I'd as soon have some friend of his to make me pretty speeches as not."

"I'll tell Charlie just as soon as ever he comes home," I said, indignant tears in my eyes. "And as for you, I wish you hadn't come in; for I was happy, and you've just spoiled my day."

"And Satan came also," said my neighbor, with her harsh laugh. "See here, Harman, don't go to pulling anybody's hair; for, don't you understand? it's all envy. Now, to speak downright truth, I believe you love your husband to distraction; and I'm awfully glad your sister is coming. The first day I saw you, says I to Cross-sticks, 'She looks sweet and good; but I'm sorry she's so pretty, because we're all ugly in this street; and it's the nature of most ugly women to want to pull out the eyes of any one who has beauty.' Says I, 'Every step that woman takes will be watched, every word she says exaggerated, and every thing she does twisted and tortured. If she looks at a man, she's a flirt: if she don't look at him, she's cunning and underhand. In fine, Harman, you'd no business to be pretty: that's the long and short of it. I don't want to tell tales out of school, and set you against the street generally, because I believe it is no worse than other streets. The fault's in you and your bonnets, and — In fine, as I said before, you should have been commonplace; and all the Jacks and Toms in the world might have come here, and there wouldn't have been a breath of scandal."

"I'll have nothing to do with any of them: I'll

cut them all," I said defiantly, feeling, but not reasoning upon, the worldly logic of my neighbor. Naturally I condemned myself easily. I had always distrusted my own power, and was far enough from wishing to attract, even before my marriage; and to have such motives imputed to me, filled me with horror. There was a distinct feeling in my consciousness of the situation, that, however frank and friendly my neighbor might claim to be, it was not exactly kind of her to place the burden upon my shoulders in that abrupt way. It was not possible in the heat of anger to sum up the argument, and look at the matter from her coarser point of view. I could do nothing but suffer, and wait for a propitious time to pour my grievances into Charlie's ear. I was sure of his sympathy and condolence; also I felt, in a vague sort of way, that he would know how to punish my defamers.

"Well, now, if you're going to behave like a fool about it, I'm sorry I told you," said Mrs. Nettleton, seeing my tears. "It's a triumph to make a whole street-full of women jealous and curious. Glory in it, my dear, and be sensible. Talk it over with Charlie, and have a good laugh together: he'll enjoy it, or I don't read him right. And now

for yeast-powder: I want that receipt you promised me."

I went up stairs to find the receipt, and did not breathe fairly until I saw the back breadths of that woman's calico wrapper going over the door-sill.

Six o'clock came, and I had reasoned myself into a more enviable frame of mind. Lina would be here soon: Lina, with her grand, philosophical way of viewing things, her calm good sense, would help me bear my troubles; and, better than all, she would take Jack off my hands, where my gossipping neighbors had placed him.

How I watched the clock! how I listened for carriage-wheels! My head ached, and my face was flushed; but I had finished every detail of household business that had to do with the comfort of my expected visitor. Every cake-pan in the house was full to the lid with the most delicate manufacture of gold, silver, coffee, sponge, and fruit cake, that my long experience and tested skill could compound; while the tea-table, I flattered myself, could not have been improved. At last, seven o'clock, and there was no carriage, but Charlie's step instead. It was a great disappointment, and I felt myself growing chill.

"Saw everybody out of the cars, and no sister to bring home to my poor little woman."

"O Charlie!"

"I know: it's a keen disappointment. But there's another train due at ten: I'll be there."

"But she would have telegraphed, — I know she would. Are you certain you went to the right depot?"

"To be sure I am: the P. and O., as you told me."

"O Charlie!"

"Explosion number one: now what have I done?"

"It was the D. and O. How could you misunderstand me?"

"My dear, I took it down from your lips."

"I told you plainly as I could speak, the D. and O."

"I am unwilling to tell you so, but you are as much mistaken as if you had shot that venerable personage known as your grandmother."

"Charlie, you are unkind."

"Elsa, you are unjust."

He did not know all I had had to bear: he only saw me trying to choke down the tears.

"Women are first-class engines," he said: "upon the slightest conflagration, or hint of one, out pours the water; the supply is never cut off, I believe. Come, Elsa, we're not making it any pleasanter, to stand here and cackle till there's hot blood. Kiss and make up, and I'll to the D. O. and G. S. if you say so, or farther still. I asked Jack to come here to-night."

"Charlie, is it possible?"

"But he declined."

"Oh! there's one man in the world, then, in the possession of a few grains of common sense."

"Thank you, Mrs. Harman," said Charlie with freezing dignity.

"Well, I didn't mean — that is — I" — and a vision of Mrs. Nettleton presented itself before me.

"I've no doubt Jack would feel immensely flattered. I'll tell him some time, but now I'm off."

"Charlie!" but he was gone, and I flung myself down, quite miserable.

Chapter Seven.

THE tea gave a most appetizing odor, and here was my husband gone without his supper. During the time we had stood there bickering, he might at least have eaten a biscuit and taken a sup. And I had sent him away in anger, or as near anger as he ever allowed himself to experience. Would Lina wait for him at the depot? Had she directions with her? did she remember the number of the house, if she attempted to come by herself? And what would she think at meeting with no one in that great, noisy depot, and at such an hour?

With these thoughts I tormented myself, walking in and out of the dining and sitting room. I might look for them soon now, for the D. and O. Depot was much nearer than the other; and I flew to the window at every repetition of the sound of wheels. It seemed to me that for months I had

not seen so many vehicles pass. I learned afterwards that there was a wedding a long way down the street; but when a carriage stopped in front of the house, I rushed to the door.

Only Charlie made his appearance: it was cruel.

"I was so sure she was there that I hired a carriage," said Charlie; "and of course I had to drive home."

"And you didn't find her?"

"I did not. There's some mistake: she has been detained, or she didn't come. Depend upon it, some one asked her to marry him, just as she was starting, and she went to church instead."

"Charlie, don't joke," I said.

"If I had a modicum of Jack's common sense, now!"

I grasped his hands, and when I lay sobbing on his bosom I think he was repentant.

"There, there, we won't joke any more on serious things," he said, soothing me. "There's some little mistake; but depend upon it, it will come out all right. Let us be good Christians for once, and leave it in His hands. Won't you give me some tea? I confess to feeling a little fatigued."

We ate and drank in silence. Then as we sat

together, I gave him the outlines of Mrs. Nettleton's visit. He started for the door: I never saw him so angry.

"I'm going to tell that woman never to put her foot inside my door again," he said.

"Charlie, you wouldn't be so imprudent: you know *he* is one of the proprietors of 'The Regulator.'"

"I don't care for old Nettle, and I don't care for his wife. I'm not going to have you murdered by inches, and I'll tell that desperate old meddler so to her face."

"That's right, Charlie! keep your promise, my son," said a well-known voice, and there stood Mrs. Nettleton, her harsh face aglow.

Charlie's bravery oozed out at his fingers' ends: I knew it through sympathy.

A woman who could forgive such language from a man must have been more or less than human. I have never yet exactly found out in which category Mrs. Nettleton was, but she certainly behaved with admirable wisdom. She must have known that she herself was indicated by his speech, but she had the adroitness to say, —

"*I'm* not old Mrs. Mullinary, to be sure; but I

can settle a score of that kind a good deal better than you can. Men can't fight women, but women can. Mrs. Mullinary is a cheat: she never leaves you the full pint; I've tried her again and again, and Mrs. Harman has found her out, I suppose. Oh, leave her to me! I'll worry her so that she'll go to confession to-morrow with a heavy heart."

"To be sure, Mrs. Nettleton," said Charlie, with cold politeness. He could have knocked a man down easier than to have exchanged half a dozen angry words with a woman, valiant as he had seemed.

"Your sister hasn't come, then. Half of G Street has made that discovery; now, that's curious."

"I went first to the wrong depot," said Charlie.

"So I imagined, for my little nephew told me he saw your sister — at least, the lady who was here some years ago — at the upper station."

Here was new trouble: what if Lina had missed her way! I fancied a thousand incoherent, impossible things. All my neighbor's eloquence was lost upon me.

"She's been here before. She's an English tongue in her head. She knows where you are.

She's no fool, and no chicken either. Don't be a goose, but just sit still and wait patiently. Depend upon it, before you know it she'll be here."

At that moment a carriage rattled up to the front of the house. Charlie was out like a flash, bareheaded. I heard the old merry laugh; and almost before I could speak or think, I was in her arms, all cares forgotten.

Ah, what a sweet meeting it was! The old self, too, scarcely a year older in appearance since I had seen her last! And that laugh! all doubts, all cares, all bad visions, fled before the contagion of its happy, care-free music.

"I've had such an experience!" she said, laying aside her wraps; "and oh, I'm so tired!"

"You'll have supper, then: every thing is ready."

"So I see; but no supper, if you please. I've been fed like a princess, and made a most charming acquaintance. O Elsa! and he knows you; and really, he is so handsome, so companionable, I wonder you never wrote about him."

"She means Jack!"

"She has seen Jack!"

Spoken unitedly by two persons slightly chagrined.

"O Lina! and I did hope to have the pleasure of introducing him to you," I said; "but if you're not too tired, tell us all about it."

Mrs. Nettleton had disappeared.

"Well, I *am* very tired, and suffering with my old enemy the headache; but I must tell you why I came so late. In the first place, nobody was at the depot."

Charlie explained, with my voluble assistance; and, for once in my life, I was not told not to interrupt.

"Never mind: don't waste any regrets upon it; I assure you I don't. Of course, as we neared the city, the cars thinned out, for it seemed to me they stopped every few minutes. At the last depot but one, a young man entered. He reminded me of Charlie, only of course he was not so good-looking."

"No, indeed," with some energy from myself.

"Nor so old," continued Lina with a laugh.

"Not so *mature*, if you please, Miss Lina," corrected my husband.

"I don't know why I was attracted by his face; but I was, for some mysterious reason that psychology fails to account for so far."

"Oh! I don't wonder. Jack is splendid; isn't he, Charlie?" with an annoying recollection of Mrs. Nettleton and her visit.

"I believe he so considers himself," said Charlie gravely.

"Well, never mind: I presume he is quite as conceited as good-looking men generally are. I looked at him, and he looked at me, always rather stealthily, and especially, on my part, because he brought Charlie to mind, as I said before."

"Umph!" said Charlie; and, laughing merrily, Lina continued, —

"When I saw no Charlie, and no Charlie's better half, I was very much disappointed; for my journey had begun to tell on me, and I felt tired and hungry. However, I had sent my luggage by express; and after waiting full thirty minutes, and no indications of anybody coming for me, I hired a carriage, and gave the directions. Oh, yes! he knew just where to go, had been there before: so he shut me in, and slammed the steps, and off we rattled.

"It was quite too dark by this time for me to distinguish the way; but it seemed unconscionably long. I peered out, but could find no landmarks.

At last we stopped before a house somewhat resembling this, but much larger, though I did not notice that circumstance at the time. Up the steps I toiled, after paying, and rang at the door. It was answered by a little fairy about as old as your sweet May would have been, if she had lived; and I fancied I saw a resemblance."

Charlie sighed. The loss of our darling had been the one terrible sorrow of our lives, — our little heaven-held babe, who staid with us but one short year.

"I couldn't help kissing her for May's sake," continued Lina, "though I wondered at her presence. I was ushered into a lofty parlor; and then I knew I was lost. A sense of strangeness came over me. At the farther end of the long room a gentleman sat reading a newspaper; and if you will please tell me by what instinct I recognized the back of his head when I had been admiring his face for the last hour or so, I'll be obliged.

"He rose, after a moment or two, laid down the paper, turned, gazed, started, — I thought he changed color, — and came forward.

"'Pray, sir, will you be kind enough to tell me where I am?' I asked.

"'Mrs. Harman, a widow lady, keeps this house,' he said, and I saw the corners of his mouth curl up under his moustache. 'I fancy you have been brought to the wrong place.'

"'I certainly have," I said; adding, *sotto voce*, 'I've not heard of Charlie's death, and I hope Elsa isn't a widow. Besides, this house is utterly strange to me.'

"'Curious,' he said: 'the coachman must have been tipsy. I know your destination. Charlie Harman is a friend of mine: I am very intimate at his house; and you — are the sister they are expecting.'

"'I certainly am; and I cannot think why he failed to put in an appearance,' I said, feeling supremely ridiculous with that six-footer laughing at me, as I knew he was, inside. Fortunately the widow Harman came in just then; and learning the facts of the case, and that her handsome boarder was interested in my situation, she was kindness and civility itself. While the gentleman went out to get another hack, she had some refreshments brought up, and then insisted on my resting. I was never more kindly treated in my life, by your friend for your sakes, and by the land-

lady, I shrewdly suspect, for his sake; for she can't be much past thirty, and a very pretty woman too. So there you have the whole story."

"And all your scheming, little woman, to keep Jack out of your letters, that you might have the supreme satisfaction of being the first on the field to make them acquainted, goes for nothing," laughed Charlie.

It was too bad.

Chapter Eight.

SUCH confidences! such happy chats! but of course you know all about them, kind reader. The days and weeks rolled by on golden wheels. Charlie the tactless behaved angelically, and Jack came and went as usual; no, not quite as usual, for whereas formerly he manifested some respect for wholesome hours, he now seemed utterly unaware how the time flew. And he seldom asked me to sing: who could wonder, listening to the rich, liquid tones of Lina's voice?

I can see her now as she was then, her rippling, golden-brown hair, clear beautiful profile, with the straight brows, the perfect nose, the red lips, the graceful pose, looking for all the world like a lass of ripe eighteen; throwing me — where I was very willing to be — in the shade completely.

Our mornings were well filled with work and merriment. Many things in the *menu* underwent

a transformation. Lina netted and talked, crocheted and talked, sewed and talked, worked with broom and duster, and made things straight, and talked. We were always together, always finding new, rich materials for the use of our tongues. Some of the neighbors came in, and went away full of praise.

Mrs. Nettleton still made her impromptu visits; and Lina studied her, and laughed at her, not as an enemy, not with a sneer or contempt, but a hearty sense of the humorous, and a thorough appreciation of the roughness that concealed a deal of good sense and good feeling. And in the clear delightful evenings, Jack came, and I saw my heart's desire gradually becoming accomplished. He watched Lina absorbingly at first; then he deferred to Lina; and always when we left the house for recreation or amusement he took Lina.

It seemed to me I renewed my youth. My old interest in outside matters came back to me. Together we enjoyed concerts, lectures, galleries; and it was in one of these latter, that Charlie distinguished himself after the old fashion. There were, among a great variety of brilliant works of art, some much-talked-of pictures. Charlie, though

knowing little of the technical rules of the profession, took upon himself to criticise the paintings that particularly pleased or offended him. One of these last was considered by some critics quite a masterpiece, and by him a failure.

We had traversed the length of the gallery; and Charlie lingered so long before some of his favorites, that I attached myself to Jack and Lina for the second round. Presently, in due course of time, we came across Charlie, talking with a little man in black, with a pale face and heavy beard.

"Hallo!" said Jack, "Charlie has made acquaintance with the painter of that picture, I see. I wonder who introduced him. I should particularly like to know him myself."

We strolled on and near his vicinity. Charlie's voice was audible, his movements energetic. A terrible dread came over me. Suppose Charlie did not know the man, but had picked him up as he would any stranger. I grew positively cold, and drew a little nearer. My presentiment was correct.

"I tell you," said Charlie, "the man who painted that picture was a blunderer, an ignoramus. I don't see any thing in it to rave about."

"Does it follow, because its beauties are hidden to you, that therefore it is worthless?" queried the little man, with a peculiar expression of the eye and lip.

"O Jack! he *has* made a blunder," I whispered: "what shall we do?"

"Let him find it out," laughed Jack.

"I never saw such colors in nature; *you* never saw such colors in nature. Candidly now, did you ever see just such a sky as that?"

"Precisely," was the answer.

"I should like to know when and where," said Charlie explosively.

"When and where I painted it," said the artist composedly, — "near Munich, in the year '36."

Charlie turned about. His face was a study. He looked the little man over from head to foot. Jack nearly exploded at his response.

"Ah! it may be very like a German sunset; but I'll be whipped if ever we get up any after that style in America." And again, "I beg your pardon; but, if it will be any palliation of my rudeness, my wife admires your picture very much."

The little painter laughed heartily; and as we turned, after moving on a short distance, we saw

the two shaking hands as vigorously as if they had been friends for a lifetime.

"Isn't it queer?" said Charlie, when he rejoined us. "I've made the acquaintance of the most famous painter in the world, by abusing him."

"Charlie," I responded, "I was ready to die with shame when I heard you talking to him."

"Well, you needn't have felt a bit badly. He complimented me for my straightforward blows; said it was refreshing to hear the truth now and then from a plain-spoken man."

"But did he think it was the truth?" asked Jack.

"Oh! well, of course he knew it was, to me. I don't s'pose I've convinced him that he is not a painter."

"I'm sure I should hope not," laughed Jack.

"But still they're an awfully conceited class," said Charlie. And yet he confessed to me privately, that he never had felt so cut up in all his life, as when he learned to whom he had been abusing the picture. "But I was bound to put a bold front on, and stand my ground; though of course I apologized." Charlie was very silent during the rest of the evening, and we could hardly

prevail upon him to express an opinion. Lina and Jack also seemed somewhat constrained, so much so that I wondered if any thing had been said of that sweet old story to which generation after generation has listened since the world began.

Chapter Nine.

CURIOUSLY enough, I began to feel that I had lost Lina. Gradually her merry spirits failed her; and so did her tongue. She sat through long silences, seemingly lost in thought. What could be the matter?

"When is the wedding coming off?" Mrs. Nettleton asked, one morning, when Lina was up stairs.

"I don't know that there will be any wedding," I made reply.

"Then I can see better than you can through the walls of a brick house," she said. "I think the neighbors have stopped talking now: that man is in love with your sister."

"Of course he is in love with her," I said: "who wouldn't be?"

"Well, I dare say a good many men have seen her before," was her dry rejoinder.

"Yes, and she has had proposal after proposal;

but she never would give one of them the least encouragement. How could she, with three children and a helpless brother to take care of? Now, however, she has really got time to fall in love; and I hope she will. I won't say I have schemed for it; but I have hoped and perhaps prayed for it."

"All right. Of course the Lord has heard your prayers: I'll take that for granted. Do let me have a hand in the wedding-cake, for luck, if it's only mixing the raisins, or beating the eggs."

"We'll see about it," I made gay reply; but I was not quite at rest about Lina. Something troubled her: I could see that. The signs were unmistakable in Jack's manner, if I could read any thing of a man's heart, and I pride myself on my practice that way in Charlie's case, and of being a shrewd prognosticator; but Lina, my own sister, puzzled me. She would flush and glow at the sound of Jack's footstep, her eye would brighten if he spoke to her; and then would come that droop and dejection as soon as he had gone, the effort to rally, the dead failure, and her abrupt disappearance. Never before had she been so unwilling to talk about herself; and, if I spoke of Jack, she quickly turned the subject.

I bored Charlie on the subject, but he could not enlighten me further than to say, —

"Jack will have her if he can get her; but of late I have seen, myself, that she rather discourages his attentions."

"O Charlie! I haven't noticed: that is terrible!" and I set myself to work harder than before to study Lina.

"Lina, what do you think of Jack?" I made a venture one day, when she was sitting in the bay-window, trimming a new dress for me.

"What do I think of him?" — she looked up in some surprise — "as much as ever I did. He is an exceptionally fine fellow, quite as good as Charlie, which is saying as much as I ought to."

"Oh! only I thought you were rather cool toward him the last time he was here," I ventured.

"Cool — why — I don't know," and she bent lower over her work, but not before I saw her face go from red to white. "Was I at first so very demonstrative? I hope not."

"Not any more than you should be, dear, and yet there was a difference. Do you know Jack is coming to tea, and will bring my namesake with him, by special request? I do hate to entertain a

stranger, and yet it seems as if so much was due her for her kindness to you."

"Coming to tea!" said Lina. "I wonder if — if he ever gave that poor little soul any encouragement."

"What poor soul?"

"That widow: nobody will ever love him better than she does, I fancy. He ought to marry her."

"Lina, are you crazy?"

"There's no law against it, I suppose: she certainly is very near his age, and she as certainly loves him. I saw that during the little time I was there."

"But I'm sure he don't love her: I'm positive."

"You were always one of the positive kind," said Lina; "but for all that, he may marry her, you know."

"Never! and you don't think so yourself, you know you don't, Lina. You know you'd feel like death if he did."

She gave me one look, — she was very pale, — then she gathered the dress up in both hands, suddenly, passionately, and hurried from the room.

What had I done? Was she angry? I had never seen her angry in my life: her judgment was

always so cool, she was so free from absurdities of all sorts. I felt like a culprit, and yet a sadness possessed me; for I knew that underlying her silence and her action was some secret sorrow that I could not even guess at.

I put by my work, and wandered about aimlessly. If Charlie had not come home loaded down with bundles, I could not have borne the suspense much longer.

"There, look at that!" he said. "Did you ever see such glorious oranges? Every one cost sixpence, and I suppose a dozen will do. What! not in the doldrums again, I hope! What's the matter now?"

I related my conversation with Lina.

He laughed at me.

"Jack loves her, sure as guns," he said; "but maybe they've had a little tiff. Don't you know the course of true love never does run smooth? Even we have our small crosses, you know, little woman."

"Oh, but such very small ones!"

"Yes; but nevertheless they're spots on the moon. Jack will soon lose the languor of intention which marks the first stages of that romantic epi-

sode called love, and declare himself: then it will come out all right."

"But why in the world did Lina fly away from me in that fashion? can you imagine? If she likes him and he likes her, one would fancy she might be confused or nervous, but not angry or unhappy."

"Oh, well! don't meddle with it, my dear: such things always grow on one's hands; let them alone. If there is any trouble, be sure Lina will tell you about it in time."

"But it makes me a little unhappy," I replied. "I did hope it would be all sunshine while Lina was with us; but she has changed within a week: she's not like the same person."

"My dear, did you expect to get through Lina's visit without an infliction as old as the Jews, that of the three T's?"

"What do you mean, Charlie?"

"Trials, troubles, and tribulation. When I was a boy we had a favorite play. Several of us would be blindfolded, and then joining hands march valiantly forward, repeating, —

'Here we go through the Jewish nation,
Trials, troubles, and tribulation,' —

and, perhaps, we brought up with a bump against the barn-door, or a flounder into some hole. I don't think we ever tried it without coming to grief, and it was a favorite play. So if you look for unlimited pleasure in this visit of Lina's, there'll be sure to be a barn-door in the way, and you might as well make up your mind to stumble against it. We are all blindfolded, groping as soon as we come into the world, and groping till we go out of it: at least, that's what the minister says; but I didn't mean to stumble on to theology. Let Lina go her own way, and don't interfere. My word for it, she'll tell you every thing, or she's no true woman."

I went up stairs to call my sister to dinner, after I had put the oranges away; and here let me say that, having a distaste for the fruit, I forgot all about them. Lina's door was locked; and when I knocked she declined coming down in a voice that betrayed tears, pleading a headache. It was very strange. The more I puzzled over it, the stranger it grew. However, we ate dinner without her, though I must confess it was a silent meal, missing her merry chatter.

How should I get at the cause of my sister's

depression? Jack was unchanged with regard to his interest in her, but evidently felt that there was a change in her manner towards him. Charlie had counselled me to leave the matter alone, and I had always found it safest for me to defer to his judgment.

Presently came the postman with letters — all for Lina. I had the curiosity to examine the postmarks. Two of them were from old Scranton, the home of my childhood; one bore a foreign seal; the other was from a neighboring town to our birthplace.

"She'll be glad of the home-letters, I know," I said to myself as I went softly up stairs. "I wonder who her home correspondent is: such a large, clerkly hand! I never saw it before; but of course I don't know all Scranton."

I knocked at the door; a faint "Come in" was the response. The room was quite dark: Lina was on the lounge at the foot of the bed. She had been weeping.

"Here are letters for you," I said, holding them out. She took them with a faint cry; threw the two superscribed with the heavy hand aside, with, I thought, a shudder; thanked me, and proceeded

to open the others. All sorts of wild thoughts assailed me as I went down stairs. Had Lina been spending recklessly, giving away or lending money, or was her income in danger? Something she had done to cause this unusual excitement; and the two missives that she tossed aside so contemptuously were perhaps lawyers' letters. It must be some unusual crisis, thus to affect the well-balanced mind of my usually self-contained sister. I was afraid to ask her if she was coming down, for I felt my heart sink in anticipation of her answer. Jack would be there at six with his pretty landlady; and I had so depended on Lina for her pleasant entertainment: all her sayings and doings were so pointed and tempered not only with judgment but with grace. I always had a keen sense of my own deficiencies, and never more than when I was called upon to entertain company. But Lina was simply superb: the more trying the situation, the grander she rose to meet all its difficulties.

I was consequently as much astonished as relieved when she came down stairs at just the right time to a moment, faultlessly attired, and looking only a trifle paler than usual. In her hand she carried a letter.

"It was too good to keep. I want you to read it," she said, a smile in her heavy eyes.

"I didn't know, dear, that you had any correspondents in Scotland."

"Yes, indeed; a little lady who is going to astonish the world," she answered. "I first found out the wonderful power of her voice; and it was at my suggestion she took up with the idea of travelling. *En passant*, she wrote me this vivid description of Edinburgh, or rather the part she saw."

The letter was written in a faultless but very fine hand.

"FRIEND OF MY HEART, — I am hanging in the air, or seem to be, to-night. How I got here, I hardly know; for it was between twilight and dark that an exceedingly nondescript sort of vehicle labored up the steep streets, threatening to spill me out every moment. When I landed, I felt as if I were under an avalanche of house-tops, and presently they were all coming down on my devoted head. Story after story projected, — dim, dark, funereal, goblin-like, — but presently a mighty hall seemed to swallow me up; and walking down from the vastness of its farther space, came our landlady, a speck in the distance, but presently emerging into the luminous circle created by the one hanging lamp. She was all nose and white apron, — a slim, spare, high-cheek-boned, raw-looking Scotchwoman, with more cap-ruffle

than hair, and an exceedingly narrow smile on exceedingly wide lips. Oh, my dear! the Scotch people in America are nothing like what one meets in this their ain countrie. No. indeed! And the old houses in America are like the great-great-great-grandchildren of some dame permitted to live beyond the normal term of life.

"Our landlady summoned from some region below a girl with red arms, red cheeks, and red hair; and we were ushered up the broad old staircase, whose balusters had been carved ages ago by some beauty-loving workman, into a small suite of rooms, filled with furniture of the most antiquated description. And from the rounded, projecting window of that room, before the red lassie came up to lay the cloth for supper, Tat and I" ("Tat is her sister, my dear," said Lina) "saw old Edinburgh by gaslight. How shall I describe it? how shall I paint it so that you shall form at least a faint idea of its beauty? Fancy hanging gardens all studded with diamonds; fancy a hundred terraces shining with glow-like sparkles, now running a zigzag line of brilliancy down a steep declivity, now mounting into some eyry on the tops of the mountains. Fancy a city in the air, lighted from end to end, — fairy fountains of flame playing in the far distance, balconies shelving out into the darkness of night, — a wonder-world, showing here and there glimpses of outline, but no base to rest upon. We were startled from our delightful outlook by the clatter of dishes. Our maid came in, covered from wrists to shoulders with the belongings of the tea-table. Very deftly she managed them. The dishes slid from the hollows of her arms: only long experi-

ence could have enabled her to carry such a load. And yet, talking with her afterwards, she said she was new to the place, having *only been here a twelvemonth.*

"'What's your name?' asked Tat.

"'Jenny Deans Haflitt, miss,' she answered with a courtesy that would have delighted the heart of our grandmothers, and a broad grin showing very white but very uneven teeth.

"'Jenny Deans!' cried Tat, glowing, 'why, who were you named for?'

"'In honor of the name of my godmother, miss:' another courtesy.

"'Yes, but don't you know Scott's heroine was Jenny Deans?'

"'No miss, I dunnot:' said Jenny spreading out the spoons — real silver. 'Were he sib to ould clishmaclaver Scott wha gaes aboot in duddies?' which speech translated means, —

"'Was he related to the old gossip Scott, who goes about ragged and dirty?'

"'Good heavens!' cried Tat; 'the ignorance of these Scotch! To think that Jenny Deans shouldn't know the author of her name! it is too dreadful.'

"'Will I whang the bread for ye?' asked Jenny in her deep guttural tones.

"Did she mean toast it, or break it, or what? Seeing our indecision she took up the knife.

"'Oh! cut it,' said Tat, 'yes, and butter it too.'

"We had a delightful tea; and after that, till bed-time, we just gloated on that swinging, hanging, up-hill-and-down-dale Edinburgh, with all its lamps alight.

"The next day we went shopping on the principal streets, having been assured by our landlady that we should have a *gigot* and *neeps* for dinner, about which we speculated all the way, but could come to no conclusion. And oh that shopping! All down one side of the wide thoroughfare lined with noble shops, and on the other side open country — a splendid park alive with birds, bright with verdure, trees, grass, glinting water, gardens, — a paradise to shop in.

"When we returned we found our gigot and neeps: what do you think they were? A leg of mutton and turnips! How we laughed!

"Pray write me how you are prospering, and if St. Olave is still on the anxious seat. Sometimes I wish you would marry him, and then again I wonder if you could. Still it seems to be the settled opinion of all the town folks that you will. If so, joy speed the wooing. As to this world's goods you couldn't do better."

Here I turned to my sister. She was very pale, but instanter she flushed rosy red. Was this the reason she had given me the letter to read? I turned ice-cold.

St. Olave! — a widower of ten years standing, the president of a bank, and fifty! Fearful fore-

bodings entered and occupied my mind. Lina had not been frank with me, if — if — but I could not pursue the torturing thought. St. Olave — and Jack! I was on the point of speaking when the bell rang, and our company came in.

Chapter Ten.

I WAS not yet over the shock of that direful suspicion, yet I managed to make a show of composure as I ushered the little widow up stairs. She was pretty, with a frank, *debonnaire* expression, and engaging ways. So pretty she was and so very childish in her manner, that I did wonder that Jack had not been caught in the toils before now. During the five minutes spent in shaking out the folds of her dress, touching hair and collar to see that both were in the right place, I learned that she was not the manager of the house; that she only held it in her name, and her mother was the real head, — which softened somewhat the incongruousness which had attached to her situation in my thought. There was a silken ripple in her brown hair, a dimple in cheek and chin, that made her at times quite dangerously bewitching.

I went down stairs wondering what Lina would say to Jack, and with that ominous name ringing in my head a hundred changes, St. Olave. Lina was chatting and laughing now, calm as a summer lake; and presently the widow and she were deep in the intricacy of a new crochet pattern, as merry and unconcerned as if no tears had been shed. Had that step that haunted me been taken? If so, knowing Lina as I did, I was sure there could be no compromise in her mind. I observed that in many little delicate ways she brought my namesake into notice, and contrived that Jack and she should be together. If I could only have learned the facts hinted at in the foreign letter, though I might have been more anxious, still I should have felt more at my ease.

I had known St. Olave since I could first remember, — a sallow man, and handsome in spite of his complexion; straight as an arrow, and proud as a prince. When my father died, I was old enough to comprehend the attentions he was always showing towards Lina, — the keen, half-sorrowful gaze which he fastened upon her, the smile if she chanced to notice him. He seemed literally not to care if all the world knew his love, and for a long

time it had been my private opinion that he worshipped her. He was very rich, owning real estate in the neighboring city, and half a dozen farms in my native county. Many an anxious mamma had flattered and *fêted* him, and more than half the marriageable girls in town would have had him, chiefly for his standing and his great wealth. But I had never dreamed that Lina would encourage him. Even now it flitted through the corridors of my thought like a half-ghostly vision.

I found our new acquaintance exceedingly entertaining, particularly when Charlie came home. I left them alone, declining my sister's offer of help, for I felt that it was not the time and place to question her, and how could I have foreborne to do so? So deterring motives kept me by myself.

When all things were ready, I went into the room. Charlie had as usual put his foot in it by telling a story about the sharp practice of a widow who wanted to get some patent right noticed in "The Regulator," and was laughing, unconscious of the flushed face of Lina, or the facial efforts made by Jack to telegraph his friend and at the same time refrain from laughter; for the story was a comical one.

"Ah, I tell you, these widows have a way of doing things," he was just saying as I entered: "they are the deuce and all for getting round a a fellow. For any sharp practice commend me to the keen mind of a widow, and particularly a handsome one."

"Charlie!" said I, with considerable staccato force.

"Yes, dear!" said Charlie quite as explosively, jumping to his feet, and blindly aware, by my voice and manner, that he had done something ridiculous.

"Tea is ready: will you take Mrs. Harman out?" with a slight stress on the *Mrs.* The blood flew to his face, to the roots of his hair. Conscious now that this singularly youthful and charming woman was one of that class whom he had been holding up to the edification of all, he looked as near idiotic as a sensible man could well do; and I was glad over his discomfiture. Mrs. Harman, with the utmost tact, glided into a new channel of conversation, and matters were soon toning down to comparative ease, except when Charlie made an inadvertent remark concerning the silver, which was capable of being turned into a joke.

"My dear, where are the oranges?" said Charlie.

"We will have them this evening," I said aside: "I forgot them."

"Oh, no, Elsa! I particularly want them now."

"Then please wait till I turn out the tea."

"Certainly: but tell me where they are; I will get them."

"No, please," said I with decision.

The tea was poured, and my hands at liberty.

"My dear, won't you send one of the servants for those oranges?" queried Charlie again.

"My servants are all out for the afternoon, Mrs. Harman," I said laughing, or rather trying to laugh, as I left the table, a thing I particularly dislike to do; and, after some little trouble, procured the fruit.

Forbidden fruit it must have been, for it brought trouble with it. Charlie was in his element. He brought all the napkins in requisition that he could find, and tried one knife after another, till at last he bethought him of his pocket-knife. On my best damask table-cloth the yellow juice ran, that demented man, quite in his element, all the time eloquent on the subject of oranges.

At last they were distributed. Charlie, taking a

long breath, tasted his, and the pantomime began. He made a horrible face, and took another; then he wriggled and shook his head, and tried another. It gave me a crawling sensation throughout the entire spinal column to witness his gestures. In vain I signalled and shook my head.

"A dollar a dozen for oranges, and sour as vinegar!" at length the monster asserted.

If I could have reached his foot I know I should have crushed something. The spirit of rebellion was not stronger in '76 than that which now burned in my bosom. Would nothing stop that husband of mine?

"I'll give that Italian fruit-seller a piece of my mind, next time I see him, the cheat!" continued Charlie, raising his voice. "My dear, get some sugar, — two bowls full. It will take all of one to sweeten mine."

"I rather think there's enough here," I said, attempting to speak lightly, but almost breaking down.

"Pass it round, pray do: these are regular boarding-house oranges."

"We don't have such at *our* boarding-house, do we, Mrs. Harman?" said Jack nearly choking, for

I could see by the movement of his muscles that he could have roared, had he dared, while the little widow was similarly affected, though in a less boisterous degree. As for me, I drank some boiling tea in utter unconsciousness of a scalded mouth and the tears it sent to my eyes. The degree of hate which I brought to bear on Charlie for a few unhappy moments was simply stupendous, and I am afraid placed me for the time in that category of criminals who break the sixth commandment.

Why would he be so thoughtless? so perfect in every thing else, but in want of tact contemptible? I thought to myself.

By this time the blunder had got through his head.

"I beg your pardon," he said, not particularly to anybody, and then he laughed nervously, and then he looked at me; but I did not see that he received any special comfort from what he saw in my face. If I looked at all as I felt, he must have thought me a Daniel come to judgment; for his face grew long of a sudden, and he pushed his chair back. For all practical purposes, he was extinguished for the evening, of which Jack was the lion. Jack did not devote himself exclusively to the little widow,

but there was a certain subtle meaning in his attentions, that interpreted itself to my mind in this way: For a day or two, indeed for a longer period, Lina had been perhaps unconsciously cool towards him; and it seemed as if he would like to pique her into jealousy by his attentions to Mrs. Harman. It did not appear that he succeeded. I thought I even detected an uneasy sense of satisfaction in my sister at the result of her coolness, though now and then an unutterably sad expression came into her face. Suddenly an awful thought occurred to me.

Had my Charlie, in his unconscious but none the less mischievous frankness, made this strange coolness between them? I had seen far sadder results follow a very thoughtless or random speech. And if that should be the case, Lina did not like to wound my feelings by informing me. I slowly came to the conclusion that it might be so, and determined to question her on the first opportunity.

Mrs. Harman sang in an exceedingly sweet voice, like the piping of a bird; but compared to Lina's voice it was as the fainter notes of the finch in contrast to the swelling song of the nightingale.

The feelings of distrust and indignation which I cherished toward Charlie weakened before the

close of Mrs. Harman's visit, but I was quite capable of taking him to task rather severely after our visitors had left the house.

"Blame the oranges: don't blame me," he said, a little surly for him.

"Yes; but why could you not have kept quiet when you found them unpalatable? Don't you know it's the worst breeding in the world to speak of such things when the matter cannot be mended?"

"I've not arrived at that point of refinement, I suppose," he replied rather sleepily. "I ought to have swallowed the oranges like so many sugar-plums; and I do wish the boarding-house had stuck in my throat. However, it can't be helped: and please don't break my heart; it's very brittle just now. Come, kiss and forgive. I acknowledge I am a bear, and you may look me into propriety just as often as you see fitting occasion. I'm no end of sorry, I am indeed."

Poor fellow! he looked so handsome and penitent, so fully aware of his unfortunate tendency to disturb the peace of his small household in the most innocent and unconscious manner, that I could not keep my anger. It vanished with a kiss.

"And only think how rude of you, that widow-story," I continued; for, woman-like, though I had forgiven, yet I could not help recurring to the forbidden theme.

"Wasn't it an outrage? I wish I could bite my tongue either before or after such speeches: I'd a little rather it would be before, though," he added reflectively, "because it would suit you better. Do you think she cared?"

"Of course she noticed it; but she is very lady-like, and overlooked it splendidly. And she is so pretty! I am a little at a loss to know why Jack hasn't fallen in love with her before, now I have seen her."

"Jack was saving up for your sister, my dear."

"I don't know, Charlie," said I, shaking my head: "Lina acts strangely of late. Are you sure, you unfortunate boy, you have said nothing, even in joke, that might cause coolness between them? Every thing was going on so beautifully!"

"Why, of course I am, dear. Whenever I have been tempted to joke, I have always thought of you, and your claim upon my forbearance has checked the mischief; though Charlie and Jack are such old chums, Elsa, I don't think you needed to be afraid in the least."

"Only if Lina should hear it. She is more sensitive than I am."

"That couldn't happen, you know, because I've never said any thing. But couldn't you change the subject? Morally speaking, it has an unpleasant aspect to me; and, physically speaking, I'm half asleep."

Chapter Eleven.

LINA was much pleased with Mrs. Harman. She expressed herself more guardedly than usual when we discussed the matter on the following day. The foreign letter and the allusion to St. Olave were uppermost in my mind; but I felt a reluctance in referring to them, which made me nervous and constrained in manner, until Lina said,—

"For pity's sake, Elsa, what is the matter with you? and why do you look at me so?"

"I might have asked the first question of you, Lina, yesterday," was my reply.

"When, pray?"

"Why, when we were talking of Mr. Inglehart. Don't you remember how you rushed out of the room?"

"Yes." She bent lower over her work. "I didn't feel like talking about him then. I don't now."

"But I think you might tell me the reason of the change."

"What change?" she asked, without looking up.

"The change in you, and in Jack too."

"Indeed! do you notice that he has changed?"

"He certainly did not seem so cordial — so — so lover-like, as usual. There, it is out."

"O Elsa!" she responded in a voice that seemed choked with emotion.

"What is the trouble, dear? won't you tell me? You know I would try to comfort you. And if there has been any little mistake" —

"Don't, Elsa!" and this time the voice was almost inaudible; for her face had fallen lower, and the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"Then you have quarrelled, or you won't have Jack," I said with sudden decisiveness. "There's my castle crumbled, vanished. I am so sorry. It was such a goodly one."

"The next thing to be done is for me to go back home," said Lina in a very suppressed voice.

"But Lina, you promised — you promised — I did hope we should keep you with us all summer."

"Yes, but that was before — I may as well tell you," she added, more and more agitated: "I only wish — I dared to wish I might die."

A new current of fear ran through my heart. Was it so terrible as that? What could have happened? What dismal future threatened my good and gifted sister?

"Only tell me," I said, hardly daring to trust my voice.

"Yes, I will. You remember, in that letter — the name" —

"Of St. Olave? indeed I remember *him* well;" and a dull fear caused my heart to throb. I almost anticipated the very words that fell next from her lips.

"I have engaged to marry him."

The news fell heavily on my consciousness, not because of St. Olave. At any other time, if I had not known Jack, I should have thought my sister fortunate in her choice, but not now, for I divined what had followed, what would follow.

"He has been very kind; he has been very constant. For years I have known what he thought of me, and twice I have refused him. But after the children were taken away, and brother went home with his new wife, such a sense of loneliness came over me! And I met him again, and began weighing his merits, among which constancy

was surely the most conspicuous; and I began also to relent a little, and allowed him now and then to show me attentions. He is rich, he is handsome; but I cannot love him. If I had married him then, the esteem I felt for him might have ripened into a sentiment stronger than friendship; but now that is impossible. What shall I do? what shall I do?"

"It means you had not seen Jack then," I said involuntarily.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so!" she said, exhausted with the excitement and the tears. "The first time I saw him, the very first, a new kind of esteem took possession of me. I felt some way as if I had a right in him, — had always had. He has never been like a mere acquaintance; and now" — her voice broke again.

"And now you love him, Lina: don't be afraid or ashamed to say it."

"I should be. Am I not engaged to marry another man? Does he not trust me with his whole soul? Am I not deceitful and a hypocrite? To myself I look the meanest thing on earth."

"But how could you help it, Lina?"

"I could: I dallied with the temptation with my

eyes open, till it was too late. And now I must go on. What did I want of his riches?" she continued quaveringly. "I have plenty to live upon: I didn't need a husband. But some way I pitied him."

"You thought you loved him."

"I didn't think — not that way: I didn't know what love was — then," she answered.

"And now that you do, Lina, it would be a sin to marry St. Olave."

"There it is!" and she held up both hands with a gesture of despair. "I do love Jack, I do, I do!" she added passionately: "the thought of that other is odious." Then came a little ripple of compassion, for relapsing into her usual quiet she murmured, "Poor fellow! he has loved me so long, so hopelessly!"

"Oh, how vexatious!" I could look only on the worldly side of the matter, — the loss of Jack, the keenness of his disappointment, for I felt sure that he loved Lina. And then there was so much sympathy between them, in points of taste, age, experiences, — they were so perfectly suited to each other; while St. Olave, though in every way suited to make a woman happy, was yet old enough to be

her father. I had thought of Jack so long as a possible brother-in-law that I felt a claim on him now. I wanted him in the family as an adjunct to Charlie. I was shocked and pained, perhaps more than I confessed to myself, that Lina had never consulted me; but yet I could excuse her, for she did not quite exonerate herself for yielding, not feeling the sort of regard that such a promise required, and therefore was shy about speaking of it even to a sister. After she had met Jack, then began the war between inclination and principle; and now I felt sure that she would sacrifice herself and Jack.

"Here are my letters," she said, smiling through her tears. "You know the large white house with the terraces: well, he tells me he is having it and the grounds remodelled. He is going to make me a beautiful home, and his letters are patterns of good sense and penmanship. I wish I *did* like him better, Elsa, for he is a most estimable man."

"Not half as good as Jack," I made reply.

"Oh, yes! better, — greater; in many respects his superior. I am not blind to Mr. Inglehart's faults," she said smiling; "but — but I could love even them," she added, while a strange quiver

passed over her mouth. "However, it is no use to speculate upon the omissions or commissions of either. I am like some thirsty creature at the brink of a river from which I dare not drink. I must go home, Elsa: I must say good-by to Jack forever. I dare not stay."

"Has he asked you to marry him, then?"

"Who? Jack? I would never let him. I'm sure the declaration and the question have been on his lips more than once, but happily I have staved it off. I must not give him an opportunity. I will go home to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" I cried, aghast. "And Jack's grand entertainment on hand for next week, — all the invitations out! O Lina! you must stay to the party."

It was her turn to look astonished.

"What party, my dear? I didn't know there was any thing of the kind on the carpet."

"Indeed there is, then. I was to have kept it a secret from you; but you startled me so with your proposition to go home. Oh, yes! Jack has asked several friends to come on next Tuesday night, — a sort of surprise for you. That is why we had the carpets taken up yesterday, so we could

dance. I know how fond you are of that amusement. And Carol the elocutionist, and Miss Kraal the pianist, are to come; and Charlie has engaged several pieces of music for the dances; and — I'm so sorry I had to tell you!"

"Of course I will stay till then, dear; but I must keep out of Mr. Inglehart's way. Will you help me do that?"

I made a demure response; but my heart was not in it.

Chapter Twelve.

"MY dear, the cream will be here at six," said Charlie, as he started for the office. "How completely we have hoodwinked your sister!"

I busied myself with finding his hat, and talking about the weather.

"Keep her up stairs all you can," was his parting ejaculation, as I hurried him off.

I stood at the door, and watched him up the street. The grass in the little garden before the door was thick with jewels, and the sky was of that calm, benignant blue which imparts happiness, and a nameless thrill of something better to come, to the dullest heart. The dear little house-swallows chattered above my head; in the trees fine webs trembled to the movements of the morning breeze, a diamond on every delicate filament.

The houses opposite our unpretending house are

rather grand, with their carving and ornamentation, their fine porches and bay-windows. To my fancy, in the sunlight, they were princely habitations this morning; while the lesser buildings looked unusually piquant and picturesque.

I wondered, standing there, gazing at closed shutters, how the Irvings felt with their little newborn stranger, who came to this planet only yesterday. I gave a passing regretful thought to the Rattlins, who were to move away that day, in the darkness of the shadow of sore humiliation and disgrace. I wondered how Mrs. Murray was, lying but yesterday at the point of death, but pronounced better at night. I sighed for the lonely hearts at Number Forty, who had within a week buried their only child. And so unconsciously participating in the mingled joys and griefs of my neighbors, and giving a passing regret for those lighter trials through which I had gone myself, I entered my own pleasant domicile.

Presently Lina came down, looking very pale, but with a set, determined expression in her sad eyes. I knew how it was, though she had not spoken a word to me about it. Jack had manœuvred till he found her alone, and then and there

pressed his case. Poor Lina! it had been very hard for her; and she had not had the courage to say no, but had asked for time. So much I had learned from Charlie.

"It was so cowardly of me," she said; "but what could I do with his eyes looking into mine? If I had only gone home, Elsa, when I wanted to, I should have had less sin to repent of; but now I have a constant trouble gnawing at my heart, and I know I shall spoil your comfort and your party. I must try and get an opportunity to-night, and nullify my wickedness by telling that young man point-blank that it is out of the question, that I cannot marry him."

"And what better off will you be then?"

"I shall respect myself," she answered hesitatingly.

"Could you respect yourself if you married one man while loving another?"

"O Elsa, don't! I have promised, given my word. I must do the best I can. I — shall — try to forget Jack, — I shall indeed. Once away from here" —

"You can't do it, Lina. What you feel for Jack, if it's like what I felt for my Charlie, will master

you; because I believe it is pure love, not calculating nor mercenary. Jack is no better off than Charlie was; and I would have followed him to the end of the world, even if I had been obliged to walk all the way. You forget and forgive every thing when you love. I do believe you could forgive and forget real injuries. Now, that is not the sentiment you feel for St. Olave."

She shuddered like one over whom a cold breath of wind passes.

"Don't say any thing about it to-night, of all times," I continued, as she moved away.

"But I must. The trouble, the indecision, the dread, the struggle, are killing me," she said passionately. "And, unless St. Olave dies, I must marry him."

"Perhaps he will die," I said. "Isn't there an hereditary malady, — heart-disease, or something?"

"Hush, Elsa!" said Lina, shuddering again.

"The man would rather die," I responded, with indignant emphasis, "than marry an unwilling bride: I should. But come, promise me you will say nothing to Jack, and I'll tell you something."

She looked at me wistfully.

"I'll go back with you, and help you bear the trial, or perhaps rid yourself of it."

"O Elsa! will you?" and she sprang forward, her face alight.

"Yes. I mentioned it to Charlie: I do so want to see the old home. At first he set his face against it; but after a while I persuaded him into almost a concession. There is only one thing that troubles me about it."

"And what is that?"

"How the poor dear will get along alone."

"But can't he go and stay with Jack?"

"That's just what I proposed to him; but, instead of that, he wants Jack to come and stay here with him. O Lina! an earthquake wouldn't disarrange things more thoroughly."

"Surely they wouldn't eat here?"

"No: Charlie's no cook. He would take his meals here, there, and everywhere for a while; but two men in the house, and only to sleep, would be nearly as bad as two elephants. But I don't mean to let that stand in the way. I feel as if my going down will be of use to you."

"Of course it will, to see your dear face in the old house again. I'll write to Mammy Brown this very day. How glad she will be!"

"But remember it is contingent upon a promise, which you haven't given me yet."

"Well," — she thought for a moment, then her tearful eyes looked into mine, — "I — won't say any thing about it. But we must go soon. I must get away from here."

"Will to-day week do? I couldn't get ready before."

"It must, I suppose; and now give me some thing to do. I must work, work!"

"I don't know what you will do, my dear, unless you wipe the china. The cake is all baked, and the jellies made, and the custards ready."

Mrs. Nettleton came in, her arms full of silver.

"There, my dear, the queen couldn't have a handsomer show. I knew you'd never ask me to lend it; and so I've volunteered, purely out of benevolence to myself. I never can make any display. Cross-sticks is always grunting over some fancied ailment: he's got the lumbago now. When he was a poor man, and worked at the case, he was healthy enough; but, since he has made a little money, there's no getting along with his oddities. Indeed, I believe the Lord gives some people riches to punish sin. So, as I'd like to see my own silver set out at least once in a hundred years, I took the liberty. Now be good, and let

me set the table. I'll make it shine, — it shall look as nice as if it were spread for a wedding;" and she winked knowingly at Lina, who turned away abruptly.

"Good heavens! I hope that sister of yours isn't one of those contemptible die-away fools, who faint at the mention of a husband before they get one. I thought she had better sense than to run away at a wink. Everybody knows how it is: I believe it has got through the thick heads of this community, that Jack comes here now to see Miss Lina instead of Mrs. Elsa, and I'm sure" —

"Elsa!" called my sister, just as I was on the point of defending her, "come here."

I ran out of the room.

Lina stood half way up the stairs, an open letter in her hand. As soon as she saw me she ran up to her room, I following.

"I saw the postman coming, and wouldn't let him ring," she said as she shut the door; "and — what do you think?"

"What?" I asked, studying her face which was pale and agitated.

"Here is a letter from St. Olave."

"Well!"

"It has been delayed."

"Yes: pray, what has happened?"

"Nothing yet. He only says he will be in the city on the 10th, and will call upon me in the evening."

"Nothing very terrible in that. I only hope Jack won't come."

"But, my dear Elsa, to-day is the 10th."

"So it is, and to-night the party! Why, so much the better: he will pass for one of the invited guests. I suppose he is in town now, then. How long is he going to stay?"

"He returns home by the next morning's train. O Elsa!"

"Well, I don't see any thing so very terrible about it. He is handsome and dignified, and we will do our best to entertain him. As long as he is coming, I don't see how circumstances could well be more favorable, that is, if every thing goes as it promises. Jack needn't know any thing, of course."

"Oh, but I shall feel so guilty! My evening's entertainment will be spoiled, for I really shall not know how to act between the two. Elsa, why didn't you let me go home?" and as she stood

before the mirror she thrust her hair back half unconsciously, then leaned forward.

"I'd better marry St. Olave, after all," she said, with a dry sob. "I'm growing gray. St. Olave wouldn't mind it, I know — but Jack" —

"Would just worship every gray hair in your head. But I don't see it," I added, on a keener inspection. "Why, yes, this and this;" and then I sat down and laughed. Lina looked at me, still grieved.

"You dear soul, these never grew in your head. What have you been doing with my old scarf that has the llama tassels? I don't believe you'll ever have such splendid white hair as this."

"I remember, I just threw it over my head when I dusted. Oh!" and a sigh of satisfaction escaped her: "I thought surely my hair was turning gray."

"Not for twenty good years yet, I hope; and then Jack and you will turn gray together."

"Hush, Elsa!" but a quick look of rapture displaced the sorrow. "I can't see my way out; indeed I can't, Elsa."

"Never mind if you can't now: you will some day, I'm determined to believe that. And now put all your fears aside, and try and enjoy yourself.

Some good providence will effect a disentanglement of your affairs in a way you never thought of. There'll be no chance to-night of any display of the tender sentiment, at all events. What time will Mr. St. Olave come? I'm rather anxious to see the gentleman now."

"Probably not till far in the evening," she said, her face clearing a little; "and oh! you can't imagine how I dread to meet him, knowing what I do."

"Nonsense!" and there I paused, for it came to me that I could have no possible knowledge of what she was suffering; not certainly by virtue of any experience of my own, for Charlie had been my first and only love. It was only affectation in me to strive to put heart in her, after all, for what could I do to lessen the real trials by which she found herself surrounded. Only my imagination, tolerably well furnished with weapons, could meet the difficulty, — meet but not in the least overcome it. The moment I said to myself, "Suppose it were my case," that moment I was lost in the bewilderment of feeling, that was certainly very like what she seemed to suffer. But somebody must put a brave face upon it; and therefore I tried to banish

thought, that I might comfort her. So I rattled on as carelessly as possible, praised her dress which she had put out on the bed, begged her not to cry and disfigure herself, and found that I wanted some lace trimming sewed on my own sober gown, and that nobody could do it as well as she could,

When I went down stairs the table did indeed do justice to Mrs. Nettleton's taste, and that worthy woman surveyed it critically.

"It is nice enough for a wedding," she said. "I believe I could pass the brief remnant of my life in setting tables, there's such a satisfaction in looking at them. If they don't set tables in heaven, half its charm will be lost to me, for goodness knows that's about all I can do in the way of the beautiful. There's somebody: let me run," she added as the bell rang. "I'm going to get myself up as fine as a fiddle. If you want me" — But the rest of the sentence I never heard, for Charlie looked into the window, and behold! Perhaps he had bitten an apple in two, for nothing else would account for that suspicious protuberance on his left cheek, unless — horrible foreboding! — it was the toothache. He had suffered once before in that same way, as I had very good reason to

remember; for it was on our wedding-tour, and the poultices made by my inexperienced hands, at a strange hotel in the dead of night, came near being the death of him, for they were made of cold water (what did I know about poultices?), and froze before I could get them well on.

I sprang to the door, distressed both for myself and for him.

"Let me get up stairs, for I'm nearly crazy, little woman," was his salutation in a stifled voice. "Bring me some laudanum and some camphor and some brandy, and a hot flat-iron, and plenty of cayenne pepper;" and away he shot like a rocket. Between the pepper and the brandy, and all the other accessories, I had the inexpressible comfort of seeing him go to sleep: so I stole down to Lina with a long face. She was dressing; and it seemed to me that, pale as she was, she had never looked more lovely.

"What did Charlie come home for?" she asked.

"Don't ask me, Lina. Oh! what shall I do if he can't come down to-night?"

"What has happened, Elsa? It can't be possible that he — that he — I thought he went up stairs so unsteadily — I thought — I thought" —

"My dear Lina," said I, with an accent of horror, "he never drank a glass of liquor in his life. Did you think he came home tipsy?"

"Well, he went up stairs so strangely, and you after him; and he spoke so that one couldn't understand a word he said. I confess that, honestly, I did. But don't look so shocked, my dear: I'll never think it again. And now what is it?"

"It's the toothache; and his face is swelled so that he — he's not fit to be seen," I sobbed.

"Well, well, my dear, it's my turn to comfort you now. That's bad; but there are worse troubles than that. We must put the best face we can on it."

"A nice face he's got! It looks like a jelly-bag. It will be no party to me without him."

"Maybe he will be able to come down."

"Oh, no! he wouldn't be seen in such a fright. I know him. It will be like the play of Hamlet with Hamlet left out."

"You must let Jack assume the *rôle* of master of ceremonies. Pray do: it will be doing me the best service in the world. Of course then he won't expect to be my shadow. And you know I shall have all I can manage to take care of St. Olave."

The bell rang: the ices had come, so had a sable handmaiden, enrolled into my service for the evening by Charlie. There was nothing for me to do now but dress and wait, and apologize for Charlie, which, indeed, was the most dreaded trial of all.

Chapter Thirteen.

WELL for me that Mrs. Nettleton was my next-door neighbor. With even her unfortunate tendency to coarseness, a better-hearted woman never existed. In any emergency, however trying, she was the first person I thought of; and, though she shocked people with sensitive nerves, she knew how, by her vigorous will and sterling common sense, to overcome obstacles, that, to women with less stamina, were well-nigh insurmountable.

"Let Charlie lie abed and growl, poor fellow," she said: "nothing in the world will do him so much good. We'll manage matters so that he sha'n't be missed. Give 'em enough to do, and to eat, — 'specially to eat, mind you, — and they'll get along without him. Now, don't worry. You're not half as bad off as if you were on a plank in the Gulf Stream. Go up to Charlie whenever you want to: I'll manage."

At six I was dressed and down stairs. Charlie still slept; and the upper part of the house was redolent of camphor, brandy, and vinegar. The first person who came was St. Olave.

"You have not quite forgotten me, I hope," he said, with the same sad yet sweet smile I remembered.

"Oh, no, Mr. St. Olave! I have not forgotten you," I said, wondering at the same time how poor Lina would receive him. And yet to me he looked taller, thinner, and darker than I remembered. His face lighted up when he asked about my sister.

"Is she well? is she enjoying her visit? does she like the city?" were his first queries, a tender solicitude in his voice that could not be mistaken.

"It is very fortunate you chose to-night for your call, Mr. St. Olave, as we give a little party in Lina's honor," I said.

His countenance changed. No doubt he had been hopeful of seeing my sister alone.

"I am afraid I shall be *de trop*," he said: "I am but an indifferent participator in occasions of gayety."

"Oh! but you will certainly remain, Mr. St.

Olave. Lina will be down soon: she is at present dressing."

Meaning to gain what time I could for her, I surveyed my (perhaps) destined brother-in-law. He was very grave, very scholarly, very handsome, but there were lines both of age and suffering in his face. I felt imprisoned in his atmosphere, and recalled the life-giving presence of Jack, with his sparkling eyes, vivacity of manner, and healthy physique.

"Oh! what was my sister thinking of?" I ejaculated inwardly; and yet when he smiled, and spoke of her, there was such a wistful, tender look, that I could not but pity him, and feel a momentary and sorrowful interest in his fate. Would this matter take the shape of duty, so religiously that every thing else must be sacrificed? and every thing else was — Jack.

"Could he console himself with the widow?" I found myself wondering. And the answer came quick, almost fierce, — "No! he loves Lina, I am sure he loves her; and he does not love the widow."

Meantime my visitor surveyed the room with well-bred interest, lifted a book from the table, and

opened it at the title-page. I saw him change color at something, and then the consciousness of what he had read sent the quick blood to my cheeks: —

"From Jack Inglehart, to Lina."

And underneath was a beautiful little pen-drawing of a dove with some device, — I have forgotten what, — for among Jack's accomplishments was that of a skilful use of the pen, drawing and shading as easily with that instrument as others with pencils or crayons. He seemed to read and re-read; put the book down, took it up again; looked perplexed, disturbed. His lips opened as if to ask a question, then shut tightly together; and then he put the volume away, evidently resolute to forget it.

I explained the situation, — in other words, spoke of Charlie's trouble, — and excused myself, intending to make a visit to my suffering husband. As I passed Lina's room I looked in.

"What is it? Has he come?" she asked, rising perturbed and trembling.

I nodded an affirmative.

"How can I go down? I positively dread to see him. See how silly I am; look how I tremble.

I shuddered when the door-bell rang, and yet I did not know it was he."

"Nonsense! suppose it had been Jack," I said: "you would have shuddered all the same."

"Perhaps, but how can I go down?"

"Wait till I have looked in upon Charlie, and I will go down with you."

"Yes, indeed, I'll wait," she said eagerly: "it will make a difference, — to me, at least."

I ran up stairs. My poor boy was still sleeping, though by certain uneasy movements I knew that the pain was troubling him. I lingered for a moment, feeling that the evening pleasure would be only a toil of pain without him, and then ran down for Lina. As we left the top stair, the bell rang. We both looked in each other's faces. Yes, it was Jack. We met him in the hall, where he was just depositing his hat.

As usual, he was demonstrative and a little noisy. I think his "Miss Lina, *so* glad to see you!" might, without any special listening, have been heard in the next house.

"Won't you go up stairs in the gentlemen's room, Jack?" I asked, hoping that Lina might gain a few minutes.

"No, indeed! I put myself all straight before I came," smiling saucily. I was obliged to confess that the dear six-footer had never looked handsomer. In my heart I pitied Lina, who tried to turn her eyes away. We went in all together.

I never saw a human countenance change as did St. Olave's as his eyes fell upon Lina, — a kind of spiritual, luminous quickening of the whole face, as, moving forward a step, he held out both hands. For a moment I thought he was going to kiss her, and turned almost terrified to see what Jack was doing.

"Mr. Inglehart, Mr. St. Olave, a friend from my own home," said Lina with heightened color, but she did not lose her self-possession. Jack bowed: he had been looking on with a strangely lowering brow; but he brightened as she spoke, and shook hands heartily with St. Olave, then, as quickly as practicable, entered into conversation with him. He was all animation and activity; but with St. Olave there was something repressed, a manner as if he were studying his *vis-à-vis*, doubtless remembering the title-page of the book near by, and its presentation.

"Miss Ainslie will tell you that we have been

trying our best to make her in love with our city, Mr. St. Olave," said Jack, while I went out to consult with Mrs. Nettleton.

"They have all been very kind to me," murmured Lina.

"But I hope they have not succeeded — I mean in setting you against the old home," said St. Olave.

"No: I return soon," said Lina, growing pale.

"Ah, that is news to me, Miss Lina!" said Jack. "I thought you were going to spend the summer with Mrs. Harman."

"I have decided differently," faltered Lina; then conquering herself, "there are matters about the old house which require my attention, and I shall be obliged to return sooner than I supposed."

St. Olave looked grateful; Jack gloomed, and cast side-glances at St. Olave. The bell rang now frequently: the guests were beginning to come. Lina led the way to the parlor, followed by the two gentlemen; and soon I had my hands full, what with greetings and introductions. There was a packed house, as Charlie would have said; and how gladly would I have hailed his blunders even, if he could only have been with me! Everybody missed him, and I feared at first that the party would be a failure.

But presently some one sat down to the piano, and set the ball rolling. Songs, glees, recitations, followed, for Jack took upon himself the *rôle* of master of ceremonies; and well he performed his part. Charlie could not have done better.

About the middle of the evening he came to me.

"All goes well," he said, with a smile. "Do you know how Charlie is?"

"Still sleeping, I hope, since he's so quiet. Isn't it provoking that he should be ill to-night, of all times?"

"Yes; but he may wake up out of pain, you know, and be down here yet in time for supper. By the way, who is that gentleman with the romantic name?"

"Do you mean St. Olave?"

"I do. He seems inclined to monopolize your sister. Are they very old friends?"

"Very; or rather he was papa's great friend, and we have always kept up an acquaintance."

"Humph! he acts more like a lover than a friend," he said, half angrily.

My face was crimson.

"Jack!" I exclaimed, with my usual explosive intonation, "don't you see that he is old enough to be her father?"

"Yes, I see that; but age is no obstacle nowadays. He looks like a rich man: how is it?"

"I believe he is tolerably well off," I replied. "He has known Lina all her life, petted her as a child, and admired her as a woman; but" —

"Admired!" he said impulsively: "if ever there was love in a man's eyes, say rather worship, it is in his as he looks at her now. And, by Jove, I don't wonder!" he added with a sigh.

Neither did I. Lina was looking down now, smiling. Her cheek was pink as a dainty rose-leaf, and the long lashes swept its delicate contour. Her beauty took hold of my consciousness like a pain. "She will not, she can not, sacrifice herself," I thought. "She must know how well Jack loves her by the very love she bears him." And then I fell to speculating upon the hidden lives of these people about me.

Miss O., all smiles as she receives the congratulations of her friends, after one of her beautiful songs to which we listen with bated breath, — is she always so radiant and light of heart as she looks just now? Does any secret sorrow prey upon her spirit? If suddenly the thoughts of even the few who have honored us by meeting here, and pouring

out their gifts without money and without price for our pleasure, could be unveiled, who would be so bold as to dare to read them? Not I, for one.

Suddenly an ominous noise startled me: something fell upstairs. Then a sound succeeded as of some heavy body crashing, rolling. For a moment terror overpowered me. My guests pressed forward with exclamations, questions. Had Charlie in an excess of furious pain broken the pitcher or thrown down the bureau? I hurried up stairs, Jack following me. There stood Charlie near the door, looking like a demon. He had been lying down in his best dressing-gown, an elaborate affair of drab cloth and blue satin, over which my fingers had ached for many a week previous to the last Christmas. He had never worn it before; and now it was a mass of wrinkles, stained with brandy, and altogether ruined as far as its beauty was concerned.

The bedstead, an old-fashioned high-poster of venerable memory, had collapsed, and in one mass of ruins lay in the middle of the floor.

"The plaguey thing came down like an avalanche," exclaimed Charlie, rubbing now his arm, then his knee, and making horrible grimaces of pain.

"Why, my dear, how could it?" I queried.

"Because I danced on it," he cried savagely. "I could dance on hot coals if I had any. I heard the music, and thought that if I exercised myself this dratted tooth would stop. When I went down I couldn't find myself for a moment, and after I found myself, I couldn't pick myself up: so I and the bedstead rolled round together, and had a little jollification on our own account. Did you hear us down stairs?" he asked innocently.

Jack was dancing round now, and roaring under his breath. I could have laughed till I cried; but the sight of the ruined finery over which I had spent such wearisome hours restrained me.

"O Charlie, your dressing-gown is spoiled!" I cried.

"Is it?" and he smoothed it out as he limped to the glass. "Can't it be fixed up? You see, there was a spell when I felt easier, and thought seriously of coming down. Well, I couldn't get my coat, you know, for it is in our bedroom; and so, hunting through the press, I found this. You can't think how nice I looked when I'd fixed myself up,—regular invalid *rôle*, you know, slippers and tie and all; when whack began that infernal tooth again,

screw after screw, till my jaws were wound up tighter than an eight-day clock. Then I mixed the brandy, vinegar, camphor, and cayenne pepper all together, and drank it down. I declare to the tocsin if it didn't set up a regular Ætna inside! I performed a private war-dance with improvised whoops, and came pretty near going down stairs on my head. If I had, you'd have seen something not announced on the bills. It's beginning again," he went on with terrible contortions of countenance: "I wonder how a jump from a four-story window would fix it."

The tears were in my eyes. How could I leave him suffering so? and yet what could they do down stairs without me?

"Don't stay here, Puggie: I'd much rather be alone. Jack will keep me company for a little while; won't you, old fellow?"

"Of course," said Jack rather ruefully. A thought occurred to me. Begging to be excused, I whispered in Charlie's ear, "Don't mention about St. Olave," forgetting that my sister's secret was not his.

"I don't know what you mean. Who's St. Olave?" blundered that blessed husband of mine.

"Oh, yes! no, of course," seeing that I was annoyed. But the mischief was done. Jack looked at me suspiciously, and changed color; while, if I had been detected in the act of selling stolen goods, I could not have crept out of the room more guiltily.

Chapter Fourteen.

WHEN I went down stairs, heavy of heart, I found the company enjoying themselves, particularly St. Olave, who had penned poor Lina in a corner, and seemed quite oblivious of the fine music and display of oratory.

Presently Jack came down, looked in the room with a careless glance just long enough to take in St. Olave and Lina *tête-à-tête*, said he was going to run out a moment for Charlie, and disappeared. Perhaps half an hour had passed when he came back, accompanied by a man whose felt hat and huge whiskers did not impress me favorably. Under his arm he carried a large bag.

"Is he a musician?" I asked, as Jack paused to speak to me.

"Well, yes," he answered, with a queer expression: "he has made some music in his time. He plays the bones."

Then I comprehended, and started forward; but Jack was already up the stairs, where the mysterious man with the bag had preceded him. I trembled from head to foot with nervous terror, and could scarcely fix my attention upon my guests.

Presently Lina freed herself, and came towards me.

"I am very tired," she said.

"Has he asked you any thing about Jack?" I said.

"Mr. St. Olave? Why should he? I don't suppose he knows there's a Jack in the world."

"He looked in the title-page of that book Jack gave you down stairs, — Mrs. Browning's poems."

"Did he? did he see that?" she asked, flushing a little. "He must have thought strange of it. Oh, how I wish the party were over! It's grown very dreary to me. I long to be alone by myself. Has — has Jack said any thing?"

Before I could answer, Mrs. Nettleton was at my side.

"Isn't it almost time to feed them?" she asked. "Every thing is ready: I can have the ices out in a twinkle."

I looked at my watch. It wanted a quarter to eleven.

"In about fifteen minutes," I said, and was just

turning to go down stairs for a final inspection, when a yell, such as I had never before heard human tones utter, sounded above. Then came expostulations, mad shouts; and once again the company gathered together in knots, eagerly asking questions, when, lo and behold! Charlie — every vestige of the angel, almost every vestige of the man, gone — appeared on the stairs, rushing towards us. If a madman had made his appearance in our midst, — and, indeed, for the time being he was nothing less, — the consternation could not have been more complete. Disfigured with blood, his dressing-gown torn and stained beyond all recognition, his hair streaming and streaking his face, his hands wide spread, no shoes on, — he burst into the room, with one of the most inhuman yells I ever heard. To escape from this frightful object became the study of all who saw him. Some rushed screaming down stairs, some up stairs; and those who could not get out crowded into the corners, under the piano, — anywhere to avoid collision with this frantic dancing figure; while I followed him with extended arms, begging him to desist, and crying like a baby.

In vain. Charlie flew to the piano, sat down, —

he has no voice for music, though he loves it well, — and gave sound to the most unearthly howls and yells, accompanying himself with both hands in discordant chords, till it seemed as if pandemonium had been let loose. Then he leaped to the top of the piano, and attempted a clog-dance. Failing in that, he sprang to the floor, personating Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Romeo, till, attracted by his sonorous voice, the crowds drew near again, and began to amuse themselves with his half-insane impersonations.

> "Oh that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw, and resolve itself into a cow!" —

was received with shouts of laughter, while portions of Romeo and Juliet were mirth-provoking beyond all description.

> "I do remember an apothecary;
> And hereabouts he dwells, *with bats and cats*
> *And rickety old owls, stuffed alligators,*
> And in his needy shop a tortoise hung."

And one other I remember:

> "Thus far hear me, Cromwell,
> And when I am forgotten as I shall be,
> And sleep in dull cold marble where no mention
> Of me more must be heard, — say my tooth
> Was pulled by Richard, duke of Gloster."

Another moment, and he seemed struggling into consciousness. Jack had of course explained the secret of this extraordinary performance, and our friends were no longer alarmed. Charlie had sent for a popular dentist, who was the manufacturer of a peculiar kind of gas, since then come into familiar use, under the influence of which he had the tooth extracted. But either he took too much, or the volatile essence acted upon his nervous temperament in a manner that destroyed, for the time, both consciousness and control of his nerves: hence his half-crazy exhibition of himself.

He folded his arms, set his shoulders high, and began deliberately walking back and forth, throwing aside whatever came in his way, chairs, ottomans, books, tables; and still he walked and walked, till at last, falling upon a sofa in a state of exhaustion, he seemed to reflect.

At that moment I went up to him.

"Charlie dear," I said quietly.

"She wants to ask a favor of me, and so it's 'Charlie dear,'" he repeated ironically. "She keeps the preserves for company too. By Jove, I'm glad when a friend drops in, for then I get something to eat," he added with a miserable little laugh. I

could have sunk to the ground with sheer mortification.

"Jealous of an engine too: friends and fellow-citizens, I — Where the dickens am I?" he asked, suddenly regaining the full possession of his senses, looking down at himself, and round upon the company.

"Never mind, Charlie," I said, "though you do look slightly disarranged. Everybody knows; everybody excuses you."

"But, I say, what have I been talking about? I'm a spectacle for gods and men. Do let me get out some way."

Jack piloted my crestfallen hero from the room, and somebody announced supper: so gathering up the fag-ends of my resolution, so terribly tried, I ushered our friends into the supper-room; and they were soon occupied in a manner that for the time prevented all discussion.

Meanwhile Charlie had dressed, and with the sounding declaration, "Richard's himself again!" made his second entrance in a less forbidding manner. Then pleasure and good-fellowship reigned.

Mrs. Nettleton proved herself invaluable. She

made me sit down, and waited upon me herself. Charlie came round, and, learning from Lina the extent of his transgression during the interregnum of his sanity, made a comical little speech in which he took it all back after this fashion :—

"My wife always considers *me* company, but she won't give me fruit-cake every night for supper.

"Also she is very kind if I happen to dip my hat in her custard.

"Ditto, she behaves like an angel when I bring half a dozen fellows without giving her notice, consequently eating up every thing there is in the house."

Each of these was received with loud applause and laughter.

"Fourthly, as for the Inferno, it is not complete. There is no toothache there.

"Fifthly, I have parted with my best friend and worst enemy, and therefore can crack nuts no more.

"'Though patriots flatter, still shall wisdom find
An equal portion dealt to all mankind,
As different *teeth*, by art or nature given
To different people, make their blessings even.'

"Begging pardon of Goldsmith, I subside."

The tears were in my eyes, born of laughter; for Charlie's little speech recalled so many of his oddities and vagaries, and more than all that picture of the earlier part of the evening, where the dear fellow danced the old bedstead down, that I could hardly look or breathe for laughing. Charlie came, to me.

"Did I make the *amende honorable?*" he asked.

"Admirably as you do every thing," I said.

"You ought to put on your best preserves every night for a year," he whispered.

St. Olave came up to make his adieus.

"I find I must start so soon to-morrow," he said, "that I beg to say good-night thus early."

"But can you not stay with us?" I asked.

"No, I thank you: my things are at the hotel. I am pleased to hear that your sister and yourself are about to visit Scranton."

Charlie pulled down his face. Jack, who was near by, walked off to the window.

"Yes, I have promised Lina to go back with her."

"The dickens you have!" I heard Charlie say under his breath.

"Then I shall hope to see you soon. Good-

night," and, making his adieus to the company, he was gone.

"Who is that long fellow, Charlie?" asked Jack, drawing a deep breath as he came back to the table.

"I presume that long fellow is the saint my wife spoke of up stairs. How is it, Puggie? is the ancient gentleman Lina's lover, or yours?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Charlie," I responded.

"Whenever she don't dare say yes or no, she answers in that way, Jack," said Charlie.

"He seemed very much interested in Miss Lina," Jack said, biting his lip.

"I thought of the old bedstead, Jack, when she asked him to stay here to-night. — Where would you have put the poor fellow, my dear?"

"I should have found a place for him."

Lina came up looking herself, for the first time that evening.

"See here, young lady, is that one of your old beaux?" asked Charlie, with his usual inconsiderateness.

She blushed scarlet, looked at me, and met Jack's eye: very hard and cold it was just then.

"Didn't Elsa tell you he was our father's

friend?" she said, her lips scarcely moving. But Jack read her face in his own fashion. A cloud overshadowed his own.

"By the by," said Charlie, "where's your pretty widow to-night?"

"I do not claim ownership in any widow, plain or pretty," was Jack's answer.

"But Mrs. Harman, our namesake, where is she?"

"At home, I suppose," said Jack coldly.

"She was invited, I hope."

"Yes, but I believe she was sick."

I noticed that when the company went up stairs, Jack and Lina did not drift together as usual; and after the party Lina hurried to her room, and there, she told me afterwards, had a good cry.

Chapter Fifteen.

CHARLIE consented — relented — argued, made applications, drew inferences, recited alarming cases; and finally, when he saw that I was determined to accompany Lina, if it were only to turn back on the following day and come home, gave up the contest.

"The very thought of it makes me lonesome," he said, the night before our journey.

"And do you suppose I resign my pleasant little home, even only for a week or two, without a pang? Shall I not in spirit behold Jack and you occupying every room in the house?"

"I'll smoke in the parlor," quoth Charlie.

"I've no doubt of it; and take the sofa-tidy for a door-mat. As for the carpet, I shudder at the thought."

"We shall enjoy your absence, Mrs. Harman. Jack shall bring the charming widow here, to sing

'Sweet Home,' just to remind us that you may be back some day. Meantime I shall learn to be dignified, and address you as Mrs. Harman."

"Charlie! if ever you do invite that woman here while I am gone! It will be just like your thoughtlessness, to set the neighbors talking."

"Hang the neighbors!" said Charlie.

"Instead of that, you'd better be preparing a pleasant surprise for me when I come home."

"There's something in that," said Charlie, with an almost sardonic grin. "I'll do it."

"I've not the least doubt of it, my dear Charlie: I expect to be surprised every step, from the cellar to the garret."

"You shall be, — you shall," was his reply, with renewed enthusiasm, "if it takes every cent we have laid by."

"Now, Charlie, you know I don't mean that: promise me you won't draw any money out of the bank."

"I shall bind myself by no promises, Mrs. Harman."

"Then I won't go;" and I threw myself down in no amiable mood, while Charlie was smoothing the lounge-cushion preparatory to a *siesta*. For,

gentle reader, this was Sunday evening. I was to leave early the next morning: how could we help discussing these little matters?

"That's the most sensible thing you've said yet, my dear. You can't think how I dread dining away from home."

"All you men think of is what you eat," said I, more and more irritated.

"Well, I must confess it does enter largely into our calculations; else we shouldn't get married."

"No, I suppose not. You marry to get cooks, and scrubbers, and wash-women."

"Don't forget the buttons, my dear: I laid my shirts all out," said Charlie, with provoking coolness.

"I'm very glad I'm going to get away from it all. I'm nothing but a drudge, any way, and I'll stay a month."

"But, my dear, you just declared that you wouldn't go."

"And I wouldn't if you were not too well pleased to have me stay. I think I might be allowed just one vacation in ten years. I'm tired of such a jog-trot life."

"So am I," said Charlie, shaking up the pillow

again. "I wish I were going somewhere. The same faces, the same surroundings, the same tasks, day after day. Oh for Santa Barbara, or heaven!"

"Why don't you go to Santa Barbara? why don't you go" —

"To heaven? Now, Elsa, you are in a passion. But let me explain. To get to Santa Barbara requires a check for five hundred dollars, a first-class car-ticket, and six months of leisure: to get to heaven" —

"Oh, hush, Charlie! you are awful," I half sobbed. "I don't see why you can't let me go without this miserable discussion. You spoil all my pleasure, and make me quarrel with you, on this the last day we may — may ever — be — to — together."

"*I* spoil! *I* make you quarrel! Why, what have I done?" and the man opened his blue eyes to their widest extent. "If I remember right, I suggested getting up a pleasant surprise; or did you suggest it? or" — putting his hand to his head — "I am getting bewildered."

"And you said that all you got a wife for was to cook and wash and clean; and" —

"Well, now, did I? I have a hazy impression

that you said that; and you know I make it a point never to contradict you."

"Yes, as if I were a child," I sobbed miserably. "I'll te — tell Lina never to be mar — married to Jack, or any other man. She'll be sor — sorry if she does."

"She'll be sorry if she does, and she'll be sorry if she don't," laughed Charlie. "But look here: you haven't told me yet whether St. Olave was one of your old beaux. What in the world did he come here to see Lina for? I thought there was something queer in his actions."

"Suppose you write and ask him?" I queried.

"Good idea!" said Charlie.

"Charlie, if you ever write or speak to him on that subject, I'll never forgive you," I responded, rising. "You are the most imprudent, pig-headed, obstinate" — but here something smothered me. I think it was the lappels of Charlie's coat; for as I tried to pass him he caught me, and, as he has the strength of a lion, I am as wax in his hands. The consequence was that a lull ensued in the storm; and any one coming in just then (as Jack did) would have thought us in the first bliss of our honeymoon. I am happy to add that most of our quarrels ended in that fashion.

"Well, Jack, old boy, you take up your quarters here to-morrow for two eventful weeks," said Charlie. "I shall be so glad to be free!" with a mock sigh.

"And, Jack," said I, "please see to the fastenings yourself: Charlie never would think of it, if burglars got in every night."

"I'll take special care," said Jack.

"It's a dreadful responsibility, Jack," said Charlie: "birds to feed, cats to take care of, mice to catch, house to clean."

"You'll have neither cats, birds, nor mice, thanks to the neighbors," said I.

"So you're all going to-morrow, I suppose," said Jack lugubriously.

"*I'm* not going," answered Charlie.

"No, of course not; but — can I see Miss Lina, do you think?"

"I'll run up and tell her," I said; and accordingly, with some misgivings, wended my way to her room. She had scarcely been down stairs all day, complaining in the morning of a headache. I knew that from one night to the other she was the victim of a tyrannical imagination. Her word, passed to St. Olave, assumed the sacred character

of an oath. Her love for Jack, so pure, true, and real, and so thoroughly over-mastering, on the one side, and her strong sense of duty on the other, placed her in a labyrinth of doubt, from which she could see no way to honorable escape. She had been trained to the utmost strictness of adherence to principle in small matters: consequently this impending choice, involving the happiness of three human beings, assumed the most awful importance. It would have been impossible for her lightly to encourage any man: there was nothing of the coquette in her nature, beautiful as she was. Life was to her a serious thing, for which, with its every act, to be held accountable. She had dignity of character, and mental gifts of an unusual order: hence she was the severest judge and the most uncompromising witness against herself. Her present experience was altogether novel and exciting. She had no one to counsel her, save a sister with not half her talents, perhaps not her conscientiousness: therefore she stood alone, and passed sentence upon herself unflinchingly.

As I went in she put aside a letter she had been reading.

"From St. Olave?" I said.

"Yes, the letter came yesterday."

"Is he a nice correspondent? I mean, is he lover-like?" I asked.

"After his fashion, yes. He asks us to come and see Oak Ridge, — so he calls his residence, — and take tea with him, next Thursday."

"Oh, Lina! shall you?"

"Why not?"

"I never would."

"But it is to be my home; and it is a lovely place."

"Did you ever see it?"

"Only at a distance. He has bought it within a few years. I suppose he has spent a great deal of money upon it."

"That's one consolation," I said musingly.

"What?" she spoke quickly, sharply.

"Plenty of money. I can imagine how delightful it would be for Charlie and I;" and I thought of Santa Barbara, where for years Charlie had been longing to go and visit one of the dearest friends of his youth.

"Yes, for you and Charlie, I don't doubt;" and she spoke with a bitterness I had never heard in her sweet voice before; "but — oh, Elsa!" and, hiding her face in her hands, she shuddered all over.

"You sha'n't go to Oak Ridge, and you shall *not* marry that man," I said with new determination.

"Who will prevent it?" she asked, lifting tearless eyes.

"I will. I counsel you to write immediately to Mr. St. Olave, to write frankly the whole truth. Then stay here, marry Jack, and don't go back till you take the old home in your way for a wedding-trip."

"Oh, Elsa! what a ghastly insult to that poor man! Why, it would kill him outright."

"And you will die in less than a year if you marry him. Now, which life is worth the most?"

"You can't tell that, *I* can't. I might live to be old; but any great shock would soon loose his hold on life. As you said in thoughtless badinage some time ago, he has some trouble with his heart: he told me so himself."

"Oh! then, he wants you as a nurse."

"You are mistaken, Elsa," and Lina's cheeks were as pale as her brow: "he wants me because he loves me, and has loved me ever since I was a child. Such constancy is rare. Mr. St. Olave is one of the noblest, best of men. I cannot wrong him, no, not if I suffer all my life."

"But Jack"—

"Has only known me a few weeks, Elsa. He will — we shall both recover from our brief — infatuation."

"Oh Lina, for shame! Is it infatuation which makes your cheek so pale, and your smile so mournful? Lina, there is a love that never dies, and I believe you feel that love for Jack. And he has never before seen any one that he thought about the least, in that way; I mean, till he saw you."

"How do you know that, Elsa?" asked Lina, with a faint, quick flush.

"Because I do: that's enough; don't make me betray confidences."

"And I am the first!" exclaimed Lina, an exulting smile lighting up her eyes. "O Elsa, how foolish I am!" and again she hid her face.

"Yes, all these years, for he is thirty-one, you know. It seems as if he had been waiting for you, and you for him. It must be so: I will have it so."

"It is not as you or I will, dear," said Lina solemnly. "Our lives are ordered by a higher power. I cannot, cannot consent to break this man's heart. He has built all his hopes upon me.

I should perhaps be his murderer. These things happen, are allowed to happen ; and from broken lives grow sometimes the most heavenly results. I shall keep my word to St. Olave, Elsa, but I will wait till I return before I write to Jack."

Chapter Sixteen.

BUT come down stairs now."

"Jack is down there, then."

"Yes, and he asked for you."

"I am sorry. I cannot go."

"O Lina! and going away to-morrow. Do come and say good-by to the poor fellow."

"I will not see him. Don't you understand that I cannot see him?" she asked with a quiver in her voice, and I saw her hands clutch convulsively.

"And in this state you are going to your bridegroom. I think he'd thank you, if he knew."

"Hush, Elsa! can't you?"

"No, I can't and I won't. I had better be as rude as Mrs. Nettleton, and set your duty before you. I tell you St. Olave would much rather die than have a wife who loves some one else."

"And I tell you I shall get over this as soon as I am away, out of sight and hearing. Why, even

his footstep on the — But how absurdly I am talking! Elsa, you must make my excuses. I am not well, really. I am not in a fit mood to talk with anybody."

"I'll just tell him the truth, then," I said angrily: "I'll say you won't come down."

"I know what he will talk about: he'll continue it some way."

"But I promise you Charlie and I will sit up, and sit, and sit, till we drive him off. Only don't send the poor fellow away without a sight of you, — pray don't."

"My only safety lies in not seeing him," moaned Lina.

"But he probably thinks it is all caprice; that you have been amusing yourself with his attentions."

"O Elsa! he can't; you don't believe that," she said aghast.

"I don't know: it looks like it."

"I wish to Heaven I had never come!" she made passionate exclamation.

"Wish the next best thing, that you had never seen Jack, my dear: it does so much good to wish."

"True, true, there is no use in it," she said languidly.

"I'm very thankful I didn't make the match, though it was in my heart all the same. But you see, dear, you both fell in love at first sight, so it couldn't be helped."

"It must be helped," she murmured.

"Come, come! time presses."

"I cannot go down, Elsa."

"Now, are you in earnest?"

"I cannot go."

"You won't see him again. It's not likely he'll be at the depot to-morrow, if you refuse him your company to-night."

"I can't go down. I had rather not. Indeed, Elsa, you must make my excuses."

"I'll do no such thing. I'll tell him you won't, as I said;" and I fear I slammed the door as I went out.

"What! isn't Lina coming?" asked Charlie, as I entered.

"I don't know: she is not very well," I said, not daring to look at Jack.

"You're not going to leave us to spend a dull evening all by ourselves," said Charlie, as Jack, looking sour and dispirited, arose to go.

"You two are never dull, I dare swear," he said;

"but I — I believe there's an engagement somewhere. Anyhow I'll go walk a while. What time do you leave, Mrs. Harman?" he asked, turning to me; and I pitied him, for he could not conceal his deep disappointment.

"By an early train, — seven, I think."

"Then you will kindly present my compliments to Miss Ainslie: I shall probably not see her again."

One thing and another detained him. Charlie had a fine picture which he wanted him to pass judgment upon; then he asked his opinion on a new book, and hunted up "The Regulator" in order to read a criticism from some able pen. Poor Jack had dawdled on till nearly nine; and now, just as he had turned determinedly away, the door-knob creaked: my heart gave a great throb: there stood Lina, convicted by her own sweet, beautiful presence. Never had she looked so like an angel; and as for Jack, if the heavens had opened, I don't think the illumination of his face could have been surpassed. He was so overjoyed, so delighted, that he did not even return her greeting, but stood looking at her brightly, as if she had been a spirit.

How beautiful they were together! — she, her

head reaching a little above his broad shoulders, all grace and softness and elegance; he, the impersonation of manly strength and nobility. I thought I had never beheld so lovely a picture; and it seemed as if she had held the cup of her trouble upside down, and let every drop of bitter run out, she was so charming, so social, so full of life and vivacity. I could almost see the pattern of her thoughts, — how she determined, if this was indeed her last sip of happiness, to make the occasion one upon which he could look back with unalloyed pleasure. Outside it was moonlight; the white beams drifted in, and gave the room a picturesque vitality. Charlie and I sat at one window, Jack and Lina at another. They chatted and laughed, and talked of matters pertaining to every thing but themselves. I wondered what had come over my wilful sister, thus to change her determination. Had she let reason and common sense have their way at last? had she decided to take my advice? It seemed like it; and I was silently happy. It was so pleasant to see them sitting together, to hear his careless laugh, and to fancy how they looked into each other's eyes!

True to my promise, I kept Charlie up, though

he ventured all sorts of hints. I knew by some fine instinct, that the moment we left them, she would go also.

The clock struck eleven before Jack rose to say good-night. Charlie had said good-night some time before; for, his head reclining upon my shoulder, he was fast asleep, poor fellow! I sat still, for I wanted a word with Lina; but she ran up stairs as soon as the front-door shut: so I waked Charlie with some trouble, for he was a sound sleeper, and while he was on his way to our room, I ran in to Lina.

There she lay her length upon the lounge, weeping as if her heart would break. The sight chilled me at once.

"Lina, what have you done?" I cried.

"I have been inconsistent, weak, and wicked," she answered. "I thought I locked the door. O Elsa! when will this trial be over?"

I sat down by her side, and softly drew her head upon my shoulder.

"What made you come down, after all?" I asked.

"I don't know. I struggled a long time before I could decide; then all at once, I began to fear

that he was going, that perhaps I should never see him again, — never, never, never! The thought was such agony that I could not bear it: my only fear was that he would be gone; and I believe I prayed wildly that you might keep him for only one more word, one more glance. So when I came down, I was so happy to find him still there, that every thing seemed heavenly beautiful; and I could easily have fancied myself in paradise. But it is all over. To-morrow I shall go — oh, so gladly! — away — away. Maybe, once gone, I sha'n't think of him — in this way."

"Do you not see what great dishonor you are doing St. Olave?" I said gently. "Suppose he knew all this?"

"But he does not know it: he never will. I shall forget it myself by and by;" and she tried to laugh, but it was a feeble effort.

"You won't forget it; Jack won't forget it: and all for an old man with one foot in the grave. Seriously I've a good mind to tell him myself."

"No, dear, you won't," said Lina composedly. "There — it's all over: this is the last trace of weakness that you shall ever see. I have quite made up my mind. As soon as I get home, I shall

write to Jack. I told him I would. He shall know every thing. He has misgivings now, I think, — has had ever since he saw St. Olave. I shall be very happy: don't you worry. You may have the homestead. I'll make it over to you as soon as I am married; and you can come and spend your summers there. Won't it be delightful?"

"Oh, very!" I said dolorously: "almost as cheerful as going to look at your own grave-lot. If you marry St. Olave," I said, with a sudden access of spleen, "I'll never come and see you, never! And I wouldn't live in a house where I've pictured you and Jack, with your love-in-a-cottage felicity."

"That will do," said Lina quietly. "I'm sure you'll change your mind just for Charlie's sake. He couldn't bear a long parting — from — oh, but I forgot — Jack is not in the case;" and she turned away that I might not see the tears.

Chapter Seventeen.

MRS. NETTLETON was up early to see us off. She brought in a little lunch of boiled eggs and biscuit sandwiches, and bade us think of her when we ate them.

"As for your Charlie, I'll keep a sharp eye on him," she said. "There'll be no gallivanting round this mansion, while you're gone, unless it's with me," she added laughing. "And I'm going to keep a journal of all the gossip during the time you're away: it will be a big kite with a long tail to it. Maybe I'll send it over to you. Anyhow, be good girls, and keep your faces clean," and this was the elegant parting salutation of my next-door neighbor.

Charlie went down with us, all smiles. It did my heart good to see that the smiles were forced, and that every now and then he quite forgot what he was saying, and could scarcely keep his hands off of me.

"Keep her in a dark closet, Lina; don't let anybody see her: I'm not quite prepared to lose her yet. We have been boon companions for eleven long years; and though she does pull my hair dreadfully sometimes, and scolds me enough to break my heart into little pieces, though she can be cross, and look like a little savage, still I have a kind of sneaking regard for the young woman," — saying which he passed his arm round my neck, dislodging my travelling hat that it had cost me so much pains to arrange properly, and tearing my new veil.

"Why will men be such bears?" I could not help exclaiming.

"For*bear*, my love, for*bear!*" exclaimed Charlie solemnly, and tried to put my hat in its proper place, succeeding only in bringing down my hair. I believe I cried a little and laughed a little, but nevertheless I was sufficiently belligerent to send Charlie on the front seat, with Lina.

"There's Jack!" cried Charlie, just as the carriage drove up to the depot, and my second toilet was concluded. "It needed no prophecy to tell that we should find him here."

Yes, there was Jack. Lina's face flushed rosy

red as she gave him her hand on getting out of the carriage. Charlie led us into the depot, as it was yet quite early, then left us, but returned in a moment with as many as six paper parcels, oranges, peanuts, buns, sponge-cake, and half a dozen illustrated journals. Jack had made provision for the inner man alone, presenting us each with a pretty convenient volume, and the journals of the day.

And now came the parting. Absurd as it may seem, it was the hardest thing I ever did to leave Charlie standing on the platform. Oh, if I could have had my choice at that moment, — could only have returned to my snug little home!

Lina was very pale, but quite self-controlled. I fancy she thought it was a last parting with Jack by the way she clung to his hand, and looked into his face. I could not wonder, Jack's brown eyes were so wistful.

"I shall soon be myself again," she said, drawing down her veil, and turning her eyes resolutely away; while I unfolded the first of Charlie's purchases in the illustrated line, and tried to see them through a strange mist that blurred my vision.

Just like him, the dear, careless fellow! The

first picture was a terrific representation of some late collision, — two engines over-riding each other, maimed bodies, a conflagration, and general disaster. I laid the paper quickly aside, and busied myself by looking at the objects that passed with kaleidoscopic swiftness and coloring before my eyes. I had not travelled this way since I took my wedding journey, and nothing looked familiar. Two women behind us were talking incessantly; and as I soon wearied of the same succession of fields, houses, red earth, and blue sky, I could hardly help becoming interested in their conversation.

"She didn't enjoy her money much, did she?" asked the younger traveller.

"No: it seemed a judgment on her for giving up that poor young man. He had loved her so long, you see, and the blow was so sudden."

"But what became of him?"

"Oh! he died of a broken heart, scarcely a year afterwards. He told her she would be his death, and she was."

"I don't think I could marry any one I didn't love, under any circumstances," said the young, grave voice.

"I hope not, child. But we are none of us strong, very few strong enough to do exactly right, let the circumstances be what they may, and the consequences too. People will go on making mistakes, I suppose, till the day of judgment."

I knew Lina heard this conversation, for the voices were very peculiar.

"That's what they could say of me," she whispered significantly: "he had loved her so long, you see, and the blow was so sudden;" and she shook her head in her own positive fashion.

"At least, let us enjoy ourselves for a time," said I, nestling close to her, pitying her so. "Put off the evil day as long as you can, Lina. I want to forget every thing, and see how near I can come to childhood again."

To my surprise, an elegant carriage was drawn up near the depot, when we reached Scranton.

"How thoughtful!" murmured Lina: "he has sent his own carriage and coachman."

"And how exceedingly comfortable to have a carriage of one's own!" I said, leaning against the luxurious cushions, as the staid driver gathered up the reins. "I declare, Lina, if only poor Jack weren't in the way, I could almost envy you. If

there is one worldly wish I have above another, it is that I may some time ride in my own carriage. Charlie wishes it too, for my sake; but, poor fellow, I fancy he will have to walk all his life, and I with him; but then, I don't mind."

Lina was regarding me with a wistful expression. Having made up her mind to accept the riches of this world, I shrewdly suspect she was even then casting about in her thought how she would benefit her poor relations. She would, accepting the situation, be obliged to turn to other matters for solace and interest, that Jack's image might fade from her heart, if that indeed was possible.

The old up-hill, down-dale streets, how natural they looked! There was the little set garden of Ma'am Canterbury, at whose shop I had so often spent my pennies for hump-backed horses and straight-backed camels. The roses grew just as luxuriantly as of old, climbing all over the quaint little yellow porch, into the small window that once always framed the white face of her sickly boy. The boy had been dead now many years, and lay over in the churchyard, which was very near the cottage.

Dear old hilly streets, over which I had tramped

so unweariedly when a child! Sweet, unchanged orchards, with their bloom and brightness; low, undulating hills in the far distance, melting into the blue of a June sky; merry children, happy and playful, dancing under the trees, just as I had danced without a care or a fear so many years; and at last the turn into a shady road, the four lofty beeches in front of the little yard, the low-roofed, many-roomed cottage: ah, here was home!

Mammy Brown stood in the doorway, her very turban cap glowing in the red sunshine, in token of the gladness of her warm old heart. Forty years had she presided over the kitchen fires and household gods of our pleasant cottage home. When the father died, and the low-voiced mother followed him, she had wept with and consoled us, — had in one sense been a mother to us; for, though ignorant, she was a sensible, thoughtful, high-principled woman, half Scotch, half English; and not for her right hand would she have done a mean or unrighteous thing, be the gain to herself ever so assured.

And the rooms through which I ran like a girl, — small, but numerous; and the old hall dining-room, the largest in the house, wainscoted with

oak, the ceiling fancifully painted by my artist uncle. In my childhood, it had been a miracle of beauty to me. Originally it was the hall; but papa, liking the situation, had made it into a family-room, put in a bay window, and otherwise beautified it, till it was my pride and glory. How often my twin brother and myself had sat in the great window, reading out of the same book, or busy with our little schemes! I was to be May queen, perhaps, and he made the wreaths and floral decorations; or, if it were Christmas time, when we all went over to the little church to decorate the altar and the chancel, the holly and evergreens were found by his busy hands, and fashioned into all kinds of fanciful devices, till the solemn Gothic interior looked like a bower of beauty. Dear twin brother! Destined himself for the church, he died on the very day set apart for his ordination.

But the table in that room, how it had shrunken since the days when eight or ten happy people had gathered there of a meal-time! First went the heads of the family, then death claimed two of my brothers, another married and went away, then an uncle died, next an old pensioner of the family, then a relative who lived near and was often with

us; till finally only we two were left, to sip our coffee, and talk of the shadowy past. But it was a rare happiness even then. I forgot that I had ever known cares or trials; and, though Charlie's laughing eyes would thrust themselves provokingly into every thing I read or saw, and his comical, quizzical looks met me at every turn, yet I managed to enjoy my liberty after a fashion. It was so delightful, wandering in the mazes of the old kitchen-garden, where Mammy Brown dug and hoed and planted every morning.

"Miss Elsa, your mamma, she used to say that I was better than any man at garden-work," said Mammy Brown, her spare dark face half lost in the depths of an enormous sun-bonnet, as she lifted herself from the task of weeding before breakfast. "Men!" she added, gutturally, "who wants them about?"

Chapter Eighteen.

"YOU still have your antipathies against the male sex, I see;" and I gathered a wild flower or two. "Yet I think you liked my father."

"Of course, but only for your mother's sake. Your mother was too good for this world: she was a sort of angel from her very birth. Now, the man that could git her must have been a very superior male creature; and you see she couldn't live without him."

"But you don't do all the garden work," I said, while she untied the strings of the great check-apron, and took off her gardening gloves.

"Yes, I do, every mite of it,—me and a boy," she added reluctantly. "Men is men, and boys is boys. I can abide boys, but not men. Men'll have their own way, but you can make boys do your way. Haven't you found that out yet?" she asked sharply.

"Well, I get my own way when I want it very much," I said, laughing.

"Hum! then I reckon you don't want it often, for you and Miss Lina was allays of the giving-up sort. I ain't sure but it's better, too, for women that *will* git married; but I allays wanted my own way in every thing."

We were now in the kitchen, and she was beating eggs for an omelet.

"What do you think? shall we have a wedding soon?" she asked, pausing in her occupation, and looking at me wistfully.

"I can't say: I'm afraid" — I began.

"So'm I. Now, there's no airthly need o' Miss Lina's gitting married. She and me might live so cosily. I sort o' reckoned on it, when the children went away, — 'lotted on me and her jest keeping house together without no troubles of the man sort. But that walking-funeral come over here, and I'm sure he made love to her."

"Oh! but, Mammy Brown, you shouldn't call him such names: I'm sure he's good-looking."

"Yes, but he's onhealthy; I can see it in his eyes, and his housekeeper says he's liable to die any minute; I'm sure such a man is a walking-

funeral. And Miss Lina is so young looking, and smart, and lively: I don't want to see her tied to that poor sick critter."

"Neither do I, to speak candidly," I said.

"But there! if 'twa'n't him it would be somebody else, just for the disarrangement of my plans. And I don't know as I've got any right to have my say about it, either," she added, turning out the yellow edible, and rapidly garnishing the dish: "but I've been so long with Miss Lina I'd hate to lose her, though she'll take me wherever she goes; but no place won't be like the home where, in a sort, I raised ye."

Lina came in just then, pale, pre-occupied.

"You know we're to go over to Mr. St. Olave's to-night, or rather this afternoon," she said. "I received a little note informing me that the carriage would be here at three: so we must be ready."

"Goin' to look at the house?" asked Mrs. Brown, pouring out the coffee.

"I suppose it means that," Lina answered, looking at me with a faint smile.

"I shall have to start before the letters come, then," said I.

"'Pears to me you have lots o' correspondence," said Mammy Brown.

"Oh, yes! I get a letter from home every day."

"What in the name of prudence can he find to write about?"

"Would you like to know?" I asked.

"Well, yes. I can't write a letter more than once a year, and then I can't fill two pages. It's awful work."

I took Charlie's last letter from my pocket, and having finished my meal I read aloud:—

"My dear Whimsey"—

"Who's that?" queried Mammy Brown.

"That means me. I have all sorts of titles."

"I sit in the old snuggery in the midst of unbroken stillness and furniture. Jack smashed a mug to-day, but then he is unused to the care of housekeeping, and somewhat awkward as yet. We got up this blessed morning at five o'clock. It is really a luxury not to have to be called; and I think when you come home, little woman, I shall be so habituated to waking myself up, that you will have no more trouble on that score.

"Water all gone, not enough to shave with: so I toted down stairs for a tumbler full, and, by the time I reached the top again, saw that the water had found its level by leaking out of a small hole

at the bottom. Can't think how that shaving-mug got broken: don't remember having any special grudge against it. Then I sent Jack down for more water, with a bigger pitcher; and that's how the mug got smashed."

"Then he has ruined your beautiful set!" exclaimed Lina, betraying astonishment at my smiling composure, — "your green and gold."

"My dear, I packed my green and gold securely at the bottom of a chest, out of harm's way, and gave him the unmatched set out of Biddy's room, at least it would be if we had a Biddy. They wouldn't know the difference."

"But never mind," continued the letter, "Jack is going to get it new all round; so you'll be rather glad than otherwise.

"We are good boys, we two; we sit in the moonlight, and talk about our wife and sweetheart" — Here Lina flushed crimson, and bent over her cup, while Mammy Brown, her eager eyes wide open and investigating, looked from one to the other.

"I sewed some buttons on my shirt yesterday, and Jack declared there was something wrong about it. Afterwards we found out that it was because I used black silk: so Jack took them off,

and sewed them with blue, which was the lightest color we could find, and a decided improvement. I don't think you could have done it better yourself. I may have made one mistake; I suppose I have. I must have left the door open a minute or two, — either the front door, or the back, or the side, one of the three, — for I found a very choice family of kittens in the middle of your bed in the spare room when I went to get some towels out of the drawer. It was for the space of some minutes a study for a painter. Could you have seen the sweet and forgiving expression of that strange cat's physiognomy at my intrusion, heard her low murmur of content, and then could you have seen her back curve when I went towards her, and the rigid altitude of her caudal appendage, you would have written an essay, then and there, on the universality of parental affection. The cat was white, with a smudge on its nose, and for a second I stood appalled; for you know I have no special love for cats, and this one looked as if it were ready to fly at me with a three-cat power. However, after some trouble we dislodged the creature; and Jack and I, armed with a kitten apiece, which we held by the extreme tip of its infantile tail,

travelled three times up and down stairs, till we had deposited six small catkins in the ash-bin. Jack counselled that we bury them then and there in the ashes; but the howling of the afflicted cat appealed to my tenderest sympathies. I thought how should I feel if I saw you with a smudge on your nose, imploring for life at the hands of a monster twenty times your size, and was merciful. To-morrow a small boy, who has no idea of the magnitude of the office he has undertaken, will arrive here with a basket, descend to the ash-bin, and dispose of the afflicted family, for cash received. I pity him if the white feline is anywhere round.

"Since then I have scrupulously shut the door of the spare chamber, not forgetting to let Jack have an extra peek at its splendor, for the sake and in memory of you know who."

"I'd like to know who Jack is," spoke up Mammy Brown, adjusting the strings of her turban cap. "At fust I thought it was a dog, but I soon see it must be another man."

"Yes, mammy, it is another man," I said.

"What's he like?" queried the woman, with a side glance at Lina.

"Oh! he's nice," was my response; "one of the handsome kind, with splendid brown whiskers, tall, manly, and young," with unconscious emphasis.

"Oh! young, is he?" said Mammy Brown as Lina rose to leave the table, with a warning glance at me. "Then I wish to patience she had liked that one," she added as the bright folds of Lina's morning gown disappeared. "She'll die at her mother's age if she marries the other: the poor dear was only thirty-five, and didn't look twenty in her coffin. I'll never forgit it: people just hung over her, she was such a picture. And Miss Lina is more like her mother, any way, than you, — yes, in her face and her manner. You favor the Ainslie side; but they're not *bad* looking," she added reflectively.

Chapter Nineteen.

THE carriage drew up before the front door precisely at three o'clock. Lina had been nervous all day, unable to settle to any thing. She had written the letter to Jack, but I had prevailed upon her not to send it till after this visit.

"What difference can it possibly make?" she asked impatiently. "I have made up my mind. Why do you counsel me to delay it?" and her restless hands and eyes betrayed the anxiety she felt.

"Because," was my vague reply; and I had no other. Reason I could give none with propriety, and my diplomacy had seldom been of the triumphal sort. In fact, I had no genius that way.

Lina looked sweet and sad. She was dressed simply in black, with pale pink bows at her throat, — so pale they seemed almost white.

"You are losing your color," I said.

"Because I am losing my youth," was her answer.

"And yet a few months ago you rivalled me in bloom."

"Happiness is a beautifier," she said. "I was very happy when I left here; indeed, I have been always happy till now. And don't fear," she added quickly: "I shall be happy again."

What could I say? I certainly did not believe she would ever be happy again; but I could not find it in my heart to tell her so. We got into the carriage, and were driven silently along. During the whole distance Lina did not smile. As for me, I observed every thing minutely: the very hedges, the fences, the gardens, the cows with bended heads cropping the sweet grass, the hens and chickens living their short and pleasant lives in the open sunshine, the many quaint and often poor little houses of the laboring-men, for there were mills on the outskirts of the town.

"What pleases you so?" asked Lina, as I laughed aloud.

"The little man in duck trousers, and the little woman in a sunbonnet, or rather the sunbonnet with a little woman inside." They were two children, one perhaps three and the other four, trotting

along close to the fence, on the narrow, hard clay path. There they travelled hand in hand, he in a slouched and ragged hat, a world too big, the trousers rolled up from his pudgy little feet; she in the household bonnet, whose cape hung almost to her shoes. Grave as their grandparents they trudged along, and it mattered not to them that their puggy features were smeared with dirt and molasses. All the world ministered to their pleasure, to their necessities: they were wise enough in their generation.

"Poor things!" sighed Lina forlornly.

"Poor! why, all the riches of the greatest millionnaires do not represent to them what a few pebbles, the sunshine, a flower, a bit of painted glass, a mother's kiss, mean to those small atoms of humanity. Don't pity them."

"I don't for the now, but for the beyond," she said.

"And how do we know but that may be heaven?"

"True, dear. I have no right to anticipate for them, or for myself either: so I will try to be content."

"Oh what beautiful grounds we are turning in!

This, then, is the place; a very paradise. If flowers could make you happy, surely your future is bright enough." Such lovely colors! circles of pink, white, blue, scarlet, all framed in by low borders of box of the most vivid green; and there, on the broad steps leading to the mansion, stood St. Olave himself, very pale, but serenely happy. He came down and opened the door for us, and led us in as if we had been queens. I must confess that at that moment I did wish Lina had never seen Jack, all this seemed so fitting for her. The hall was full of soft colors, falling through stained glass; and at the end we looked upon a conservatory, and heard the sound of plashing waters.

Mrs. Roose, the housekeeper, a stately woman, very richly dressed in silk and lace, led us up stairs into the dressing-room. I wanted to fly round and examine things, and, with a housewife's interest, longed to find out whether it was lace on the pillow-slips of the great bed in the corner, or embroidery. There were but few trifles in that splendid room: every thing was stately, rich, imposing, and in absolutely perfect order. And so it was wherever we went, — inside or outside. Even the pens for the pigs were model pens, and

there was no litter in the barnyard. The windows of the conservatory were thrown open; and there, amid a mass of Southern blooms, we sat and looked out upon a lovely landscape, half forest, half upland, a long stretch meadow after meadow, leading up the gently swelling hills that were dotted here and there with cattle.

Mr. St. Olave devoted himself assiduously to our comfort. I certainly felt my heart warm towards him as I noticed every little delicate attention and the thought and care he gave to the minutest details that appeared to add to our enjoyment. The supper in the spacious dining-room was set out with old family silver, some of which, Mr. St. Olave told us, was brought from Holland; and later he improvised a little repast out under the light of the moon, in which we partook of the rarest fruits; and altogether our time passed so pleasantly that I caught a faint echo of Lina's old-time merry laugh, now and then.

Yes, it was very pleasant to feel that one's sister might have all these good things to her lot, a freedom from care, and a power to do whatsoever she chose whensoever she chose. St. Olave was so thoroughly a gentleman, too, exceptional in his

looks, manners, habits; and it was easy to see that he worshipped her.

Lina leaned back in the carriage on the way, and I would not break the silence; but after we arrived home our tongues were loosed.

"I'm sure that housekeeper don't like me," said Lina, languidly taking out her comb, letting the rich brown hair fall at its own will over neck and shoulders.

"What makes you think so, dear?"

"It was simply an impression, — a feeling I had when she came near me. She has been there twenty years: naturally she feels jealous of one who may usurp her authority."

"I thought her very kind looking."

"Yes, she matched well with the surroundings; rather a handsome woman too. Why couldn't he fall in love with her?" she asked pettishly.

"For the same reason, I suppose, that Jack didn't fall in love with the widow."

"Hush!" she said, with a scared look. "I have been seeing him all day. If I were superstitious, I should think some trouble had befallen him. Now you are laughing at me."

"No, I assure you I am not."

"It is true: it seemed once or twice as if I heard him call me. I could enjoy nothing, although I wished to appreciate Mr. St. Olave's delicate attentions. I'm rather glad, on the whole, that I didn't send that letter."

"I thought you'd be."

"Not that I don't mean to send it: of course I do; perhaps to-morrow."

"Then, on the whole, you are satisfied with your future home," I said.

"Oh, don't!" and she shuddered a little. "In darkness or in daylight, I am haunted by a ghost. I always shall be if I go there."

"To be sure," I answered: "that's what I told you. I wouldn't go there, then."

"Oh! but I must: that is decided. Now I am away from — now that I am here — the task will grow easy. How did I behave? Did you think from my manner" — She hesitated.

"You seemed to be on the best terms with yourself and Mr. St. Olave."

"Is it possible you thought so?" and Lina spoke with an irritation altogether foreign to her. A wave of emotion swept over her countenance: she seemed scarcely able to restrain her tears.

"I'm sure, as long as I had decided to give up Jack, I'd try to get all the comfort I could out of such magnificent prospects," I said. "I only hope I sha'n't envy you. Naturally I like ease and elegance."

"Would you change with me?" asked Lina turning half fiercely.

"You know I wouldn't; but you won't have Jack and his salary of two thousand a year. I wish he would come here and take forcible possession of you, — carry you off."

"Such things are not done in these days," said Lina, trying to smile.

"Don't you wish they were?"

"It would be a foolish wish," she said.

Chapter Twenty.

SUDDENLY we were startled by the apparition of Mammy Brown, looking as if she had risen in her sleep.

"Come this way a minute, Miss Lina, and you too," she added, nodding to me; and we followed, she leading us into a little bedroom at the top of the second flight of stairs, whose generally well-ordered interior had the appearance of having been tossed up generally. In the middle of the floor lay a carpet-bag, yawning as if it had been trying to get to sleep, and couldn't. Clothes were thrown here and there; and, tracing the line of shoes and stockings of small dimensions, our eyes were led to the old four-poster, wherein, upon pillows so soft that they brimmed over on whatever pressed them down, smiled in their sleep three cherub faces, all looking almost infantile in their profound slumber.

Lina's face was all one glow of delight, as she saw this pretty vision so unexpected.

"My dear boys! my dear children!" she exclaimed rapturously. "When did they come? why didn't you send me word?"

"*He* wouldn't let me: he said he wanted to surprise you; and they tried to set up, but they all got so sleepy! So they went to bed, and I wasn't to say a word till morning; but bless me! I couldn't keep in that long: no woman couldn't."

"I'm so glad you told me!" said Lina, gazing her fill, after she had kissed them all. "You never saw little Neddy, Elsa: he's the image of our own father; you can see his likeness even now to the picture down stairs. Oh, how pleased I am,—the darlings! I wish they could stay with me always. I wonder if it is wicked to wish they were mine to take care of. It would all have been right, if"—her lip trembled—"they had staid."

"How long are they going to stop?"

"Only till to-morrow night," said Mammy Brown. "You see, *she's* going on a visit to her own folks; and he said, that, as they came through here, he must stop and see you and the old place, if it was only for an hour."

"We'll have a lovely day to-morrow, and forget every thing," murmured Lina, bending over the curly heads. "You don't know how much we liked each other, — these boys and I: they were so full of life, and yet not a bit rude. — You must get up a splendid breakfast," she added, turning to Mammy Brown: "they were always so fond of rice-cakes."

"Yes, indeed, I've thought of that: I put the rice on two hours ago, and plenty of it; and I've had some chickens killed, and dressed 'em myself. Mr. Nathan seemed dretful pleased with his supper; said he couldn't find anybody could cook like me, and I believe he meant it. I got him up some of them milk muffins, and tossed a bit of the dried beef and cream in the frying-pan: you know how he likes that. And a very pretty little woman she is."

This odd addendum referred of course to Nathan's new wife.

"I put 'em in the best spare," said Mammy Brown, "and aired every thing. Nathan always was afraid of a strange bed, even in his own house."

The following day was given up to jollity. Lina

had not been so happy for weeks. The children hung about her in a way that was enough to send a pang to the heart of a stepmother; but Nathan's wife was a sensible little woman, and seemed quite willing to take the second place until she could win the first.

"Aunt Lina, are you going to get married?" asked Ad, the oldest boy.

"What nonsense! who has been telling you such things?" queried Lina, changing color nevertheless.

"Papa said so. Besides, you were up to old St. Olave's last night, when we came."

"Hush, dear, you mustn't call him old St. Olave: it's not respectful," said Lina.

"But papa did: he said he was almost old enough to be your grandfather, and that he was afraid you would be sorry."

"If you should be very unhappy, my dear," I said to her aside, "it will not be for lack of warning."

"If I am very unhappy, Elsa," she made reply, with some warmth, "I do not propose to blame anybody but myself. I shall be quite ready to acknowledge that it is my own fault."

The boys were rather shy of me; and I could not blame them, they had seen so little of me for years.

Yet I loved them: they were kind-hearted, sturdy fellows; but I could never have won them as Lina had. Of her they never tired. She always seemed like a new creation to them. Her brain was stored with stories; her hands were wonderful for invention. With them she was a very child. All her color came back, her vivacity, her beautiful, brilliant manner. How she would romp with them, never seemingly weary of their merry, noisy protestations, out doors and in; while I sat quietly, and chatted with my brother's new wife. She, too, had much to say about Lina, who had been her schoolmate; but, contrary to my expectations, she considered my sister fortunate in her choice, or rather fortunate to be chosen by St. Olave.

"I think him very handsome, and I know he is very good," she said, as we watched the boys frolicking with Lina in the garden, running in and out among the great pots of oleanders that had been among my mother's most cherished treasures. "There was not much chance for her, you see, for she was fast drifting into spinsterhood; and I'm sure Lina ought to be married, she's so pretty and so affectionate. Besides, she will be rich. It isn't as if she had been out in the world, you know, and

had formed attachments of any kind. I think Lina could love very deeply, almost passionately; but as she has never met her twin soul, as they say, the esteem she must feel for St. Olave will ripen into a steady, warm attachment, and I'm sure she will be happy."

I thought of poor Jack, and sighed. Just then the noisy troop came in; Lina flushed and driven by the boys, but laughing. They clamored for music.

"Yes," said Nathan, entering at that moment: "sing one of your good old songs, Lina."

"Well, what shall it be?" asked Lina brightly.

"Why, you remember my favorite; old as the hills, to be sure, but still I like it. Let me see: I believe I could repeat it word for word, —

'If thinking of him day and night be any sign,
If thrilling at the wish that he were mine, —
Then I'm in love.
If wondering where he is with conscious sighs,
Trembling to fancy I but meet his eyes,
Be tokens of that glad and sweet surmise, —
Then I'm in love.

If thanking God for this great gift be any sign,
If placing him within my heart's most sacred shrine, —
Then I'm in love.

If opening the temple of my mind,
I drive out all the unworthy guests I find,
That he may greet the noblest of her kind, —
Then I'm in love.' "

I pitied Lina. Her color went and came: I could see how short her breath grew, and how her fingers trembled.

"Any thing but a love-song," she said, trying to speak steadily. "I don't believe I could sing that to-night."

"Oh! give us something jolly," cried the oldest boy, for which I am sure she could have kissed him heartily.

"Yes," echoed the youngest; "sing, —

'The hair's all gone on the top of his head.'

That's what *I* like; that's what you used to sing when you was little, like us."

Without a word, Lina plunged into a bright little medley; and soon the boys were dancing, and kept it up till tea-time.

Chapter Twenty-One.

THE next day it rained. Lina rose early, and was practising some new music when I went down stairs. Mammy Brown had gooseberries to pick, and I found her a more congenial companion.

"It does take so long to top and tail 'em," she said pathetically, glad of my offer to help. "Miss Elsa, I've had a right bad dream about Miss Lina. I doubt whether she ever gits married to that man, for my dreams is always a true sign, — *always!*"

"What was it?"

"I dreamed that we were all going to the wedding. There seemed to be all the family here, — the folks that's dead, and the folks that wasn't, and yet we none of us wondered how the dead got alive again: I'm sure I didn't, it seemed so natural. I thought your mother helped dress Lina, and a grander wedding-dress I never see. Why, light

seemed to come from it, it was so splendid, and the veil shone like silver; but Miss Lina's face was dead white under it. Well, there was a procession, two and two, to go to the house of the bridegroom; and as we came in sight of it, lighted from top to bottom, suddenly every light went out, and we couldn't none of us know where we were. However we groped about till we found the house, and went in, all in the dark. Inside, there was a faint shining that came from neither sunlight, moonlight, nor candles: every room was plain to be seen with all its furniture, in that singular lack of natural light, when suddenly we come upon the parlor, which was shinier than the other apartments; and there, stretched upon a board, lay Mr. Olave, candles as tall as himself burning at his head and his feet. I thought the man moved and spoke, but for all that he was dead; and what do you think he said?—

"'The ceremony must be put off: I don't think I shall be married to-day.' Then a mist seemed to come over every thing; and I could only hear Miss Lina sobbing as if her heart would break, and her mother trying to comfort her. Now, wasn't that a queer dream, anyway?"

"Yes, but you had probably been thinking about Mr. St. Olave, and their marriage. It was not wonderful that you should dream about them."

"Very true; but, Miss Elsa, I tell you my dreams always mean something. How did she like the house?"

"It is a beautiful place: I think she liked it."

"It ought to be: why, he has been spending heaps of money. I always thought he was a close man, but I must say he's done the handsome thing. But I've a notion that Miss Lina looks unhappy about it. I hope she likes him. I hope there ain't nobody else."

Her eyes finished the sentence, and I did not feel at liberty to enlighten her: so I picked the gooseberries in silence.

"I thought she looked sort o' queer when that young man's name was mentioned yesterday;" said Mammy Brown, trying to feel her way to my confidence.

"Did she? He is a very dear friend to my husband," I made reply.

"Why couldn't your Charlie come up with you? How well I remember when he came to Scranton that time, after you'd been spending the winter

in the city with your poor uncle that's dead and gone! It didn't take you long to catch a husband, did it?" and she laughed merrily. "You wasn't but sixteen then. Why didn't you bring him?"

"Business, my dear old friend. Charlie is tied to a newspaper. He calls himself a bob at the tail-end of a kite: he never can get off. I wish he could: it would be so pleasant to go over to the old place together!"

"Two sweet-tempered young things," I used to say: "how easy life will go with 'em! And you look as if it had, Miss Elsa. There ain't none o' that worriedness about the eyes and forehe d which people have if things don't go right."

"But things don't always go right: Charlie and I have horrible fights sometimes; that is — I suppose I shouldn't blame Charlie, for my temper is the quickest. And don't imagine," I added, laughing at her unequivocal astonishment, "that we throw the dishes at each other, or practise with the shovel and tongs. Oh, no! it's only a little tiff now and then, in which I generally come off second best, and Charlie gets all the glory. But there's the last gooseberry, and I must go and find Lina."

She was sitting at the window, looking out upon the storm.

"I miss my boys so much!" she said.

"And I miss" —

"Your Charlie!"

"Just a little."

"Oh! then you are getting homesick," and a look of alarm chased the sadness from her face. "Don't leave me before the time, Elsa: I staid with you at my peril, and now" —

Astonished at the wildly-beseeching look and tones, I began to soothe her with promises.

"I confess I am terribly shaken this morning; I confess I don't know what to do," she added, as, an image of forlornness and disquiet, she stood there looking out upon the dripping branches close to the window. It was one of those moments when the agony of the suffering heart makes one ready to yield to whatever temptation promises relief. "While the children were here, I almost forgot it; but, waking up this morning in the silence, such a horror came over me as I never experienced before. I dare not think; and yet it is all the time before me, this future that I dread so."

"If you had only the courage to tell St. Olave, I'm sure he is just the man to pity and forgive you. I am certain he would release you at once."

She did not speak, only stood there still looking out into the gray, wet garden.

"Come: here are wools, here are books, here is music. Occupation is the great panacea, even for heart-ache. Let's do something pretty and pleasant, or else I'll go into the kitchen and help Mammy Brown make rhubarb pies," I threatened laughingly. Reluctantly she took up her worsted-work, and soon we were chatting of other things. After dinner I had occasion to go up stairs to find one of my letters, when, looking from the window facing the road, I saw at a distance the carriage of St. Olave. I knew his two beautiful grays. For a few seconds I stood debating whether I had better stay where I was, and leave Lina alone with her *fiancé;* but I knew she would call for me, and also that, being in the house, I should go down. If it had only been a pleasant day, by this time I should have been shawled and bonneted and half way up the road.

I ran down stairs.

"St. Olave is coming here," I said. "Now,

Lina, is your opportunity. I will stay up stairs, and you shall tell him all. You'll never have a better chance." She started at the intelligence, and looked for a moment so wild and undecided, that I pitied her.

"I can't tell him to-day: I haven't thought about it," she said, almost pantingly. "Elsa, you must come down, you must. When you are gone for good, and I am left to myself, then there will be time enough. Elsa, you must stay."

What could I do but stay? The carriage by this time had come to the door, and Mammy Brown appeared with a comical face.

"Show him right in here," said Lina, putting aside her wools, and smoothing down her face; and presently St. Olave was on the threshold, looking smilingly in upon us. My heart warmed to the man as he stood there, and I remembered the long period of his devotedness, and felt how wholly he trusted and reverenced my sister. It seemed to me that such love was almost divine, and I felt a sudden doubt of Jack. I wondered if he would be willing to wait long years with only a feeble hope of some time realizing the happiness that might, some far-off day, be his. Undeniably

St. Olave, whatever came, would love my sister to the day of his death.

"It is very pleasant here," he said, coming forward; and perhaps, fresh from the set splendor of his own home, where things were never out of place, the large room with its blooming bay-window, scattered papers, lounging-chairs, and sunny carpet, did suggest a comparison possibly unfavorable to the mere formal elegance of Oak Ridge.

Lina rolled a chair near the window. I picked up and sorted a few of the papers; and Lina spoke of the weather, all the time avoiding his eyes. St. Olave was slow of speech, probably because his ordinary talk was on business, and he did not go much into general society. He could not rattle off commonplaces with Jack's bewitchment of manner, and round, ringing voice. "Oh, dear me!" I thought, "how Jack would talk and laugh, would have seen a hundred things on his way here, in the papers, in books, to interest and instruct!" And here was this man, with perhaps the deeper intelligence, who though not dumb was certainly very quiet.

Occasionally the silence was broken by the stamping of the two grays.

"What beautiful horses you have, Mr. St. Olave!" I said: "I never saw a more perfect match."

"You like them? They are a pretty pair, prettier, I think, than the bays, though they travel better. I always drive them myself."

"They are fast, then?"

"Oh, very!"

"That's what I like; a smooth road and good racers," I said with enthusiasm.

"I should like to drive you and Miss Lina — that is, if she is not averse to rapid travelling."

"Oh, no!" Lina spoke up; "the faster the better. I'm never afraid."

"There is to be a new preacher at Lime Hill to-morrow," said St. Olave, after a short silence. "If it clears off, I should be pleased to drive you over there. Our own clergyman is ill, and I hear that Mr. —— has a wonderful reputation."

I was just about to utter a delighted response for my part of the invitation, when the door opened, and Mammy Brown, with a half-amused, half-perplexed face, looked in.

"My dear, — it's — it's — Charlie — and — that — other one," she said, and disappeared.

Chapter Twenty-Two.

I HAD noticed some little confusion outside, but had given it no heed: now the clatter and the voice were unmistakable. My heart throbbed with a sudden joy; I felt the blood pouring all over my cheeks; and in another moment, regardless of company, I was nestling in Charlie's arms.

But somebody stood just behind him, with eyes only for St. Olave, — somebody pale and tall, and with his right arm in a sling. I cannot describe the expression that sat on Lina's face as she met Jack's eyes, and saw that he was injured. It was like a cry that painted itself on the imagination without being heard. St. Olave saw it; St. Olave perhaps felt it, for he started to his feet, and set back his chair.

"Why didn't you let us know you were coming, Charlie?" I asked, as soon as I could find breath to speak.

"That would have spoilt our little game, my dear. I wanted to surprise you. Jack here, you will take notice, is invalided. He made a too intimate acquaintance with some machinery in the factory, and came very near having his arm torn off at the elbow. But I am pleased to report that the patient is doing well; and now that he is in the sunshine of Miss Lina's countenance, to say nothing of your own, he will do better."

This awkward speech brought plenty of color in Lina's pale face; and I saw St. Olave bite his lips, and give a gasp or two. For Jack looked all the handsomer for his pallor, and Lina could not readily command her self-possession. I feared she would be obliged to leave the room.

But instead St. Olave rose, and, after having graciously invited both gentlemen to visit him, took his leave. I noticed that his hand was almost ice-cold as I shook it at parting, and nothing more was said about the drive.

Poor Lina! how could she help it if her face would brighten as soon as the horse's hoofs grew fainter in the distance?

"Stunning turn-out, that of St. Olave: is he a good neighbor?" asked Charlie, making Jack take possession of the broad, bright-covered lounge.

"When did this accident happen?" I asked, anxious to give Lina time to compose herself.

"On Thursday," said Charlie; "and it's the greatest wonder that it didn't crush the life out of him."

I caught Lina's eye. She was deadly pale. It was on Thursday that she had confessed to being haunted by a presentiment.

"The first thing I knew of it," continued Charlie, "a paragraph in my own paper announced that he had been killed. I threw down every thing, and rushed to the Harman boarding-house. There I saw the fellow, alive but *not* kicking; for the surgeon had just gone, and he was very still. It proved to be only a flesh-wound, no bones broken; and the consequence was, with the surgeon's advice we started for Scranton last night, and here we are. All he wants is quiet and good nursing;" and he looked roguishly over to Lina.

There is no denying that St. Olave's absence was a great relief. That rainy evening stands out in my memory with distinct and peculiar blessedness. Mammy Brown brought in a basket of light wood, and made a charming hearth-stone fire, and Charlie drew up Jack's lounge. The tea-table was set in

that glowing circle; and we ate and drank merrily while Lina laughed at Charlie's sage remarks, and grew grave every time she looked at Jack. The evening was devoted to music; Lina sang as charmingly as ever, and Mammy Brown brought in hot lemonade and sponge-cake.

Sunday came with a clear and cloudless sky. Mr. St. Olave drove up for us, pale and grave as usual; and Lina and I accompanied him, leaving Jack and Charlie at home. I chatted all the way; for neither St. Olave nor Lina seemed disposed to talk, St. Olave in particular being very constrained.

On our return St. Olave proposed to drive our two visitors to a charming waterfall; and I thought he looked somewhat relieved when Jack declined. Charlie went, however, at the proper time; and I give the after conversation as it occurred, word for word, first declaring that Charlie was quite in ignorance of St. Olave's engagement with my sister.

"If you had told me, mind, just as it was," he said to me on repeating the interview, "I should not have put my foot in it as I did: therefore you are to blame."

Chapter Twenty-Three.

THEY drove to the waterfall, and after that to several points of interest, finally through a winding path that brought them in sight of Oak Ridge.

"What a fine place!" said Charlie: "splendid location! I shouldn't mind being the fellow that owned that homestead. Used to belong to old Judge Billings, didn't it?"

"Yes, years ago, and was always considered a fine property. Suppose we turn in at the gate here: you see my horses know the way."

"Then," said Charlie, "this is your property?"

"I call it home," answered St. Olave. "Stop with me a while: I should like to show you my pictures."

"With pleasure," said Charlie, and they sprang out at the door. St. Olave led the way into the house.

"I declare, you have a splendid place." (Since then Charlie has had serious doubts with regard to Lina's judgment.) "Now all you want is a pretty little wife to make it perfect."

St. Olave smiled a very faint and transient smile; and the two sat down before some fruit and coffee which a servant brought in.

"Your friend came near having a serious accident," said the host. "He is a genial, good-looking fellow: I like his face amazingly."

"Yes, Jack is one of the right sort," said Charlie. "Since he saved my life some eight years ago, when I fell overboard from a fishing-smack, and couldn't swim a stroke, we have been fast friends. I hope we shall be something nearer some time," and he gave one of his significant glances.

"Ah!" was St. Olave's quiet observation.

"Yes: my wife has always been scheming to get Jack well married. Women will do such things, you know. In confidence, that was her little game when she expected her sister. Lina's an uncommonly pretty girl."

"Uncommonly," said St. Olave, fingering his watch-chain, then shifting his position.

("I thought the fellow acted queer," said Charlie,

speaking of it to me at the time he related the conversation.)

"So she fully intended to make a match of it. But, bless you, fate plays strange games sometimes, you know: through a curious accident Jack and Miss Lina met before she reached our house."

"Ah, yes!" and St. Olave turned very pale, and pressed his lips together.

"Met — and — the obvious result followed: they fell in love with each other."

"I see," said St. Olave, breathing hard.

"Curious, wasn't it? For a while things went on swimmingly. Jack frequented our house more than ever; came there every evening, in fact, up to a certain time: we all looked for an early wedding."

"Then he — he — I suppose — asked her hand in marriage?"

"Oh, yes! I'm quite sure of that. But all at once some difficulty came up: I don't know what it was."

"On her part?" asked St. Olave steadily, though his very lips trembled.

"Yes, on her part. It may have been on the score of age, though she is a year or two younger than he; or perhaps the young fellow is not rich enough."

St. Olave sat rigidly straight, and stared his trouble in the face. The sweetest dream of his life had been rudely broken. The image he saw of his despair was like that of a face reflected in a mirror that distorts every feature. His life, so far as it was to be any pleasure to him, was wrecked, his sun going down in darkness.

"Pardon me for the question: you are sure she loves him?" said St. Olave, in a forced voice. "I have always felt an unusual interest in the daughter of my early friend; that must be my apology for such close questioning."

"Oh! I am quite certain of that," said Charlie: "at least, my wife tells me so, and she ought to know. There's some obstacle in the way: I don't know what, and I sincerely hope it may be overcome for Jack's sake. He's a good fellow, and his heart is bound up in her. I don't think he ever loved anybody before. And he makes a very fair living. It's not probable that he will ever be rich, any more than I shall, for he hasn't the faculty, and he began at the foot of the ladder; but then, why should one waste one's best years in the endeavor to make money which when it comes may be too late to give any real pleasure?"

"True, true!" groaned St. Olave: "what is money without love?" and that was the only time that Charlie suspected any thing.

"When I heard that," said Charlie to me afterwards, "I began to think that perhaps the old gentleman had something to do with it, after all. He looked so strangely white, and gathered himself up now and then, as if to bear some shock more effectually." And then Charlie rose to go; and Mr. St. Olave also rose politely, and did not urge his guest to prolong his visit, but sent him home behind his coachman.

Charlie was more silent than usual in the evening; but Lina, relieved that St. Olave did not come (for she had vaguely looked for him), was her own happy, light-hearted self for a few hours. The two staid for three days; and I had almost made up my mind to return with Charlie, when a letter received from St. Olave altered our plans.

Chapter Twenty-Four.

NINA came to me with it the morning before they started. She said nothing, but looked one moment radiant, the next dejected.

"Read it," she said, seating herself at the window, resting her head on her hands. "Aloud," she added, as she saw me preparing to peruse it to myself.

The missive began :

"My dear Miss Ainslie, — You will doubtless be surprised at the tenor of this epistle; but, in my humble opinion, simple justice demands that I liberate you from your engagement to myself. The reason is, that latterly I find myself failing day by day, and that the state of my health is so precarious as not to justify me in chaining a young and beautiful woman to my side, who should have all the world before her where to choose.

"And this I do voluntarily of my own accord, while yet loving and trusting you as I could love and trust no other

woman on earth. You must know that; you must have seen that I, in my silent, blind fashion, have yet worshipped the beauty of God's handiwork in you, even while I thought of resigning you. That this step is not taken without a struggle, that I seem to myself to be relinquishing all that has promised to make the sweetness and poetry of my life, I could call Heaven to witness. With many prayers for your happiness, and with a tender interest in all that makes your life of value to yourself and others, I now take leave of you, as a lover, subscribing myself,

"Ever your devoted friend,

"ST. OLAVE."

"What do you think of it?" queried Lina, the tears in her eyes, while yet a smile broke brightly over her lovely face.

"I think, as I have thought on one or two occasions before, that he's the noblest fellow in the world," I said.

"And don't you suppose he hoped— What am I to do?" she asked hesitatingly.

"Hoped that you would not release him?" I asked.

She nodded.

"I don't believe he hoped any thing. I believe he sees how it is, and he is great enough to sacrifice himself for your happiness."

"Oh! do you think that? It almost makes me love him," she sighed. "I should have married him — I should, indeed, — but now" — she drew a deep breath — "oh, what it is to be free!"

"Yes, if one ever is," was my rejoinder.

My visit of two weeks lengthened to four. Lina revoked her decision, and consented to stay with me the remainder of the summer. Charlie wrote me, not long after his departure, that he had considered the hint which I had dropped some time before, on an occasion that I might remember, and had prepared a surprise for me in the shape of a pony-phaeton; my acceptance of which, he begged to assure me, would greatly enhance his happiness, and, he trusted, my own personal pleasure.

"A pony-phaeton!" I cried, aghast. "Lina, is the man crazy? What can we do with a pony-phaeton? we have no stable."

"Board it out," said Lina.

"What, the phaeton?"

"The horse, my dear: have a shed built for the carriage. But it was a queer present for Charlie to buy."

"What do you suppose it cost?" I asked.

"Well, that depends. A horse worth any thing is worth a hundred dollars, and a phaeton, unless it is second-hand, twice that."

"Three hundred dollars at the least, then! My dear Lina, we had that and a little over in the bank. Can Charlie have been so rash as to spend all that money? I must write to him immediately."

"Stop, Elsa: I wouldn't write, particularly when the letter will not get there any sooner than we shall," said Lina, laughing. "If the thing is bought, why, the best you can do is to enjoy it."

"But I can't drive, and Charlie is never at home in the daytime. I shall worry myself to death over it."

"Be sensible, my dear, and wait till you know all about it. Never worry over what can't be helped."

"Pretty advice for *you* to give," I said meaningly.

She blushed and laughed.

"But that could be helped."

"And so can this: I'll sell it as soon as I get home. If Charlie imagines I'm going to uphold him in any such extravagance, he's mistaken. A pony-phaeton, in our circumstances! why, the neighbors would laugh at us."

"I don't know why they should. I can drive: at least, I'd enjoy it a few times first. Besides, it would never bring what it cost."

"How ridiculous of Charlie! it has taken away all my pleasure. He has drawn every cent from the bank, I know he has;" and with that comfortable conviction I journeyed towards home.

Mammy Brown went with us, and we shut up the old place for a time. Lina was quietly happy and very thoughtful. We had not seen Mr. St. Olave since that eventful Sunday when that husband of mine so blindly set things right. I noticed, that, when I spoke of Jack, Lina contrived to change the subject.

"I'm by no means sure that I shall marry him," she had said one day. "The fact is, that poor St. Olave has so risen in my esteem, that other men look small beside him."

"What! you're going back to St. Olave, after all? What inconsistency!"

"I didn't say that. I can't go back to a man who has himself broken our engagement; but I am convinced that he did so solely because he saw or imagined that it was for my happiness. It was very noble of him. I would have married him."

"And broken your heart."

"Hearts don't break easily, Elsa."

"You'd think so if you could hear Charlie sometimes. I don't know how many times he has been broken-hearted. But wait till you see Jack."

She did. Jack was at the depot with Charlie, and I saw Lina's heightened color under her thick travelling-veil.

"Jack, you spoke for a carriage, didn't you?" queried Charlie, when our trunks and travelling gear were collected together.

"Yes: here it is."

I looked round in expectation of the pony-phaeton; but, as there was nothing of the kind in sight, I kept a wondering silence.

"Charlie," said I, "let Mammy Brown go with Jack and Lina in the carriage, and you and I will walk: I'm so tired of riding!"

"Just as you say," said Charlie, after a brief expostulation; "I'd rather walk than ride, any day." Jack threatened to walk home with us, but Charlie hustled him into the carriage; and then, in the old sober fashion, I linked my arm in Charlie's, and we marched on.

What we talked of for the first few moments is

of little importance to the reader; and besides, if weeks have never seemed months, and months years, when away from those one loves, you will not care particularly to know. We soon changed the subject.

"I say," said Charlie, "that Mr. St. Olave is a brick. There's hardly his equal in the world. It all comes of my telling him about Jack."

"Then you told him!" I said, aghast.

"Of course I did. He asked questions, and I answered them. You wouldn't have had me hold my tongue. Besides, you had never warned me that St. Olave was sweet on Lina: if you had, mum would have been the word. How could the girl give up such a prospect?"

"Precisely for the reason, sir, that I gave up"—

"Oh, yes! I've heard that before," he responded quickly; "but there is something yet to tell you. It seems that he has considerable to do with the B—— Iron Works, for which Jack was clerking; and he has used his influence to promote Jack, and double his salary. Think of that!"

This was delightful news: it made one's heart glow, thinking of St. Olave, and I did not wonder at Lina's irresolution.

"And now I want you to tell me about the pony-phaeton, Charlie," I said, as we were nearing home.

"Not a word," said Charlie gravely; "not a word till you have seen it."

"But did you take the money out of the bank?"

"Don't look a gift-horse in the mouth, my dear; control your curiosity; be wise as the serpent, and harmless as the dove."

"But did you take the money?"

"Mrs. Harman!"

"But did you take" —

"Here we are almost at the door."

"But did you" —

"Mrs. Harman, allow me to assist you. — Jack, here you are."

Jack stood at the door, the carriage having arrived some time before. I heard Lina's merry laugh. How pleasant it was to feel that now confidence and harmony were restored!

I entered.

"Permit me!" cried Lina, still laughing. She stood behind a queer, mahogany-colored article, that almost hid her from view: it was a pony-phaeton, in gingerbread, large enough for the sign of a wheelwright.

So ended my expectations. I was so confounded that I didn't see the joke for a minute; but when, some little time after, Charlie carried me up stairs, and introduced me to a magnificent easy-chair, for which I had been longing for years as the one thing indispensable to the finish of my pretty parlor, I was foolish enough to cry, and Charlie silly enough to pet me for it.

There is but little more to add to this simple story. Lina and Jack were married at our house, and St. Olave sent them a splendid service of silver, and a beautiful letter, with his best wishes. As Lina read it the tears ran down her cheeks.

"Surely," she said, "I have been honored with the love of such a man. And indeed I do love him, and shall write and tell him so."

"What do you think of that?" I asked Jack.

"I'm not in the least jealous," he said, smiling: "he is well worth loving."

Jack took a house in the same street with us, the next door but one; and it is such a comfort to run back and forth, with our trivial, and, I hope, harmless, gossip, our new designs, receipts, and books! Lina is as happy as the day is long, and

Jack makes a pattern husband. As Charlie says, he has for years had the benefit of his example. Mammy Brown lives with them; and, being a worker and a manager, Lina's duties are light. The old house is let to a good family, and there is room enough for us to spend some pleasant weeks there every summer.

Not long ago St. Olave died, leaving to Lina, by will, twenty thousand dollars. Jack is building a stable, and the pony-phaeton promises to become a reality.

Charlie is getting stout, but he is the same merry, careless, tactless, dear old fellow that he was in the first year of our marriage; and, though I would not tell him so, yet I declare to you there is nobody in this world quite so nice as

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